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Summer No. 9

STARTLING MYSTERY

STORIES

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UNUSUAL - EERIE - STRANGE

THE LAST ARCHER

by EARL
PEIRCE, Jr.

Doctor Satan in HOLLYWOOD HORROR

by PAUL
ERNST

THE BLACK MASS

by Col. S. P.
MEEK

THE SIGHT OF ROSES

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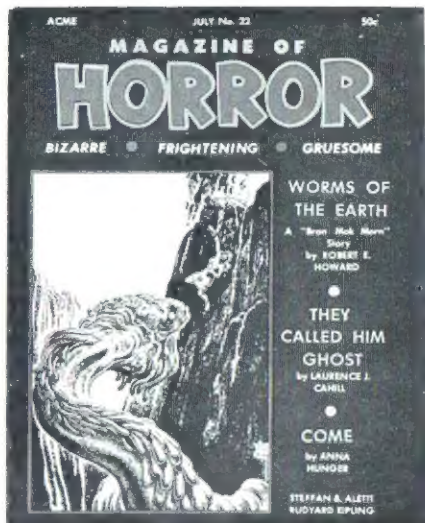
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STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Volume 2

CONTENTS FOR SUMMER

Number 3

COVER	<i>Virgil Finlay</i>	
THE EDITOR'S PAGE		4
THE BLACK MASS	<i>Col. S. P. Meek</i>	6
THE DEATH OF BOLSTER		24
THE LAST ARCHER (novelet)	<i>Earl Peirce, Jr.</i>	25
THE SIGHT OF ROSES	<i>Jay Tyler</i>	51
ACROPHOBIA (verse)	<i>L. Sprague de Camp</i>	67
WEBBED HANDS	<i>Ferdinand Berthoud</i>	68
HOLLYWOOD HORROR (Dr. Satan novelet)	<i>Paul Ernst</i>	88
THE CAULDRON (Your Letters & Our Comment)		116
COMING NEXT ISSUE		123
READER'S PREFERENCE PAGE (double-barrelled)		129/130

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES, Vol. 2, No. 3, Summer 1968 (whole number 9). Published quarterly by Health Knowledge, Inc. Executive and editorial offices at 119 Fifth Avenue, N. Y., N. Y. 10003. Single copy 50c. Annual subscription (6 issues) \$2.50 in the U. S., Canada, and Pan American Union. Foreign, \$3.00. Manuscripts accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelopes will be carefully considered, but the publisher and editors will not be responsible for loss or damage. All payments for accepted contributions are made upon publication. © 1968 by Health Knowledge, Inc. All rights reserved under Universal International and Pan American copyright conventions. Printed in U. S. A.

the editor's page

This time, I should like to discuss a number of points which you, the active readers, have brought up, these being matters where there might be a possibility of following requests (once I can be sure something is really wanted) in some instances. Some of the things you ask for it just is not possible for me to give you; but this does not apply to everything. I do hope that discussions such as these will not leave you with the feeling that I myself used to get either when reading the Editor's reply to my complaints and suggestions, back in the 30s, or reading the same thing in response to other readers: that the policy was inflexible and nothing would be done. No matter what was objected to, the Editor would reply that other readers wanted this—and, by no doubt laughable coincidence, what the "majority" seemed to want was exactly what the Editor happened to be doing at that time! So now let's get to specifics.

Cover pictures that illustrate a story in this issue: I'm in favor of it, but must sadly state that most of the time it just isn't feasible. We need not only a good picture, but a good picture in the right shape, for experience has shown that the sort of cover layout we have, allowing for type vertically either on the left or the right, is more effective than a layout where the type must be spread horizontally at either the top or the

bottom of the magazine, because the picture is a full-width one.

For a time, on *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, we tried having cover illustrations drawn for each issue, selecting a scene from a story, or making it symbolic of a story in the issue. Neither the response from you, the active readers, nor the circulation figures were encouraging. So we arranged with Virgil Finlay to purchase one-time reprint rights to certain of his illustrations wherein he had retained rights for second magazine publication. And here the results have indeed been encouraging. Everyone has not liked each picture, and some have not cared for any of them, but a majority has been in favor—and simultaneously, sales reports have indicated improvement. Can I be sure that this is due to the covers? No, I cannot in every instance; however, the pattern suggests that there may be some correlation.

Well, some of you ask, why not have Mr. Finlay draw new pictures for us? I'd love this myself, and I know the artist would be happy to oblige. However, Mr. Finlay's just price—he has earned the right to ask what he asks for a new drawing—is still beyond our means.

So while I shall happily correlate picture and a story in the issue should it be possible, there is not much chance of this happening more than once in a while; and, in fact, it has happened only once so far. Frank

R. Paul's illustration for *The Individualists* in the Spring (#6) issue of *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION* turned out to be just right to excerpt for the cover, while we used the full picture inside.

Inside illustrations: so far as new ones go, the situation is the same as with covers. A few of you have not cared for the old pictures, or some of them; and one reader feels that any sort of illustration is silly for our kind of fiction.


I don't like to appear to spurn a minority, but the general appreciation for these old pictures has been so great that I shall have to ask those in opposition to bear with us. They take up very little space, and I do not use any which I feel are bad or which, however good, tend to give something crucial away.

Range of Old Material: Many of you have urged that we use a wider range of reprint material, and here I am entirely in sympathy. In regard to this, I can only repeat that in many instances I need help in locating copies of old magazines, books, etc. Our former printers had the sort of photocopying equipment whereby a book or magazine could be copied without taking it apart. This situation no longer obtains, and we now have a photocopying device here in the office; however, experimentation has shown that pages from a magazine simply will not reproduce cleanly unless the issue is taken apart so that no more than one fold (four pages) at a time is used. I never thought I'd become an amateur binder, out that is what has happened! So I take my own copies,

Just Published

How 88,648 Heavy Smokers Stopped Smoking

NEW YORK — The Anti-Tobacco Center of America has just published a booklet which explains how 88,648 heavy smokers (of whom many are physicians) have stopped smoking without straining their will power. This booklet is available free of charge to smokers. All you need to do, to obtain it, is to send your name and address to The Anti-Tobacco Center of America, Dept A-95-S 276 Park Avenue South, New York City, 10010. This offer is open while the supply of these booklets lasts.



of the old magazines, gently disassemble them, take copies of the pages to be used, and loving put the issue back together again. However, I would not want to risk this operation on someone else's copies without express permission—for if the pages are particularly brittle, there is going to be some damage in the process.

My continuing thanks to those readers who have loaned me copies of books and magazine which I was later able to obtain, or who have generously given me permission to operate as well as I could on their own copies, trusting that these would not be ruined in the process. (Just as I typed the above, in came a copy of the June 1932 issue of *STRANGE TALES*, at a very reasonable price, from Forrest J. Ackerman. Thanks, Forry! And

(Turn to page 87)

The Black Mass

by Col. S. P. Meek

A PIERCING SCREAM BROKE THE STILLNESS of the night. A wild, cry it was, partly of pain, but mostly of sheer, stark terror. It rang through the corridors of the monastery of St. Sebastian in Malden, and woke the good brothers from their slumbers. Hastily girding on his robe, Father Albert, the abbot, came forth from his cell to find the prior already in the corridor.

"What was that noise, Brother Anselm?"

The prior shook his head. "I don't know, Father. It woke me as it did you. It sounded like one in the last extremity of suffering."

On the white flesh of the dead man's breast in livid lines, as though drawn with living fire, was a strange character . . .

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(Ret.)

What can an expert, with a reputation for an infallible memory, do when that memory proves sadly fallible? Commit honorable suicide? (Tempting). Blame it on the printers? (Tempting). Your editor bids Satan begone and acknowledges fault, pleading only that circumstances did not allow the usual check on his memory when writing the special blurb for Col. Meek's *Nasturtia*, which ran in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, May. Col. Meek's first-published story was *not*, as we told you there, *The Red Peril*, which appeared in the September 1929 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*, although it was the first to be illustrated by H. W. Wesso on the cover of that publication. It was, in fact, Col. Meek's second appearance in AS, his first being *Futility*, in the July 1929 issue—the debut in science fiction magazines of a machine predicting individual human actions. But our author's very first appearance in science fiction magazines was a novelet, *The Murgatroyd Experiment*, which ran in the Winter 1929 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*, *QUARTERLY*. The present tale is the second of two which appeared in *STRANGE TALES*; a third weird story appeared in Farnsworth Wright's magazine in 1935, and we shall hedge our bets here by saying that we do not know of any other outright weird tales by Col. Meek, though he did have some rather bizarre science fiction yarns and mystery stories in other publications.

"Are all the brethren here?" asked the abbot, looking at the monks who were crowding into the corridor.

"Brother Simon!" cried the prior suddenly. "He is in the chapel."

"What is he doing there?"

"He is spending the night in prayer by my order, as a penance for failing to place the host before the altar last night."

A worried look came into the abbot's face. "Such a matter should have been reported to me, Brother Anselm. Come, you and I will go to the chapel and learn whether he heard the cry. The rest will remain here."

Followed by the prior, Father Albert led the way to the chapel. He swung open the massive door which separated it from the sleeping quarters of the black-robed brethren, and peered within.

"Brother Simon!" he called softly.

Only silence answered him.

"I fear the worst," he said in an undertone.

The two heads of the monastery entered the chapel and glanced a-

round. The room was empty. Brother Anselm pointed to an open door on the opposite side of the room.

"He may have gone out to seek the cause of the cry," he suggested.

The abbot nodded in assent. He led the way through the opened doorway into a vestibule, on the farther side of which was another partially opened door. With the prior at his heels, he passed through the doorway into the streets of Malden.

He gave a faint cry and recoiled in horror at the sight which met his gaze. Crumpled up on the concrete walk lay a black-robed figure. It was doubled up as though it had writhed in supreme agony before being stilled forever. Most weird of all, and the thing which made the abbot cross himself and murmur the name of the monastery's patron saint, was the face of the prone figure. From it streamed a pale, unholy light. Long, phosphorescent streamers rose from it to waver for a moment in the faint breeze before dissipating their light into the darkness of the night. A faint, but nonetheless distinct, odor hung over the body. It was an odor in which the smell of burning sulphur was strangely mingled with that of raw blood.

"Brother Simon!" gasped the prior.

The abbot stepped back and closed an electric switch. A light set over the doorway sprang into brilliance. The two men bent over the prone figure. The prior's recognition had been accurate. It was the body of the ill-fated monk who had been spending the night in the chapel. His head was drawn far back and his features were convulsed in a horrible grimace. Every muscle was drawn tense and rigid. Father Albert bent over the body and opened the robe of the dead man. An ejaculation of horror broke from his lips. On the white flesh of the dead man's breast, in livid lines, as though drawn with living fire, was a strange character: three T's joined to one another. From it more streamers of weird light, visible even in the light from the electric bulb, were rising and twining about one another.

The sound of feet told of the approach of other brethren. The abbot drew the robe over the dead monk's chest. "Keep silent of this," he said in a shaken voice.

Brother Anselm nodded. A half dozen of the brothers emerged from the monastery. As they saw the prone figure, exclamations of surprise and consternation rose from their lips.

"Keep silent!" said the prior sternly. "Take up the body of this brother and place it before the altar. There it shall lie for three days,

as is our custom, before it is placed in consecrated ground. Father, shall one watch the balance of the night?"

"Let two watch and pray for the soul of our departed brother," replied the abbot. "Brother Anselm, come you to my cell. I desire counsel with you. Let the rest go to their cells for prayer and meditation."

When the two heads of the monastery entered the cell of the abbot, Brother Albert dropped the ceremonious manner which he had been using. "What do you make of it, Anselm?" he asked.

"I don't know, Father. You noticed the glow on his face and breast?"

"I did. Also I noticed the fetid odor about his body. Both the odor and the glow disappeared, or at least became less noticeable, when the body entered the sacred precincts of the chapel."

"Some electric phenomenon, I imagine."

"Electric nonsense! It's a clear night. Anyway, lightning wouldn't explain that mark on his breast."

"It does strange things sometimes, Father."

"It didn't make *that* mark. Didn't you recognize it?"

"No. What was it?"

"You should study the early history of the Church more carefully," replied the abbot. "That mark was the triple tau, the secret mark used by the worshippers of Asmodeus, the archfiend, to seal the hearts of the initiates of their vile cult. Did you not tell me that there was no host before the altar this morning?"

"I did. It was the second night on which Brother Simon failed to place it there. That was why I gave him penance."

"Did he admit his negligence?"

"He denied it."

"He spoke the truth, and you punished him. Anselm, Anselm, you need a lesson of humility and to learn that your judgment is not infallible. Did you yourself see the host placed tonight?"

"I did."

"Yet, if you look now, there is none there. The host was stolen."

"But who—why—"

"By the followers of Asmodeus, and for only one possible purpose, for the celebration of the Black Mass."

"But the Devil's Mass was one of the superstitions of the dark ages," protested the prior. "That silly mummerly and the superstition which kept it alive have both been dead for generations."

"Anselm," replied the abbot sternly, "you have studied too much in modern science and too little in Church history. There are forces in

the world which cannot be weighed in a balance or examined under a microscope. What you have termed a 'silly mummery' has been, and I fear, is, a very live and potent force for evil. The Black Mass was not, as some moderns try to say, a mere burlesque of the offering up of the Holy Sacrament. It was a very definite ritual of sin, portions of it having come down intact from the obscene orgies of ancient Babylon and the worship of Egypt. It has been in the world since time was, and it ever recurs, despite all efforts to stamp it out."

"Tell me more of it, Father," said the prior eagerly.

"It is a ritual of worship of evil incarnate, of the Fiend himself, or of one of his attendant demons. When the forces of evil are triumphant in a place, a coven of thirteen with a master is formed to celebrate it. The master is a high initiate of evil, a practitioner of black magic. In a black chapel, with an inverted cross, the coven gathers for worship, using the consecrated host which is stolen from before an altar. Even as God himself is present at the celebration of the Mass, so Satan, or one of his demons, is present at the Black Mass. He confers on his followers strange and awful power. The werewolf, the ghoul, and the vampire, are only a few of the manifestations."

"But such things never existed!" cried the prior.

"Such things existed and *still* exist," declared the abbot sternly. "Fortunately, there are those highly placed who know. The worship of Asmodeus has been officially dead for many years, but it is known to the Church that the Devil's Mass has been regularly celebrated in the Basque Country of northwestern France. This is its first appearance on this continent since the Salem affairs that I know of, although I have heard rumors that in Pennsylvania, the Black Mass is occasionally celebrated. Such learning is hard to destroy, and harder to turn into the paths of righteousness."

"But be silent of this. Officially, Brother Simon died of apoplexy. See that his body remains before the altar and that none of the brethren are allowed to touch it in such a manner that they may see the mark. I am going to Boston tomorrow."

"To see—"

"Whom I please and on a secret mission. Meanwhile, cultivate humility and study the works of Roger Bacon. Veiled in allegory as his writings are, one page contains a higher wisdom than all the volumes of the modern masters of science over whose pages you pore. From him, you may gain some inkling of the meaning of the things you have seen this night."

The prior bowed deeply. When Father Albert used that tone, there was no profit in further questions. He left the abbot's cell and visited the chapel to make sure that his superior's wishes were carried out.

Early the next morning, the abbot entered the monastery's car and was driven into Boston and to the Archbishop's palace. He was admitted to immediate audience with His Eminence, the Cardinal Archbishop. An hour later he emerged from the palace and was driven to an office on Boylston Street. He took an elevator to the door bearing the legend: *Earnest Aloysius Catherton, M. D.* He entered and gave his name to a nurse. In a few moments he was ushered into the famous nerve specialist's consulting room.

"Are you consulting me professionally, Father?" asked the doctor.

His low-pitched, kindly voice was out of all proportion to his frail body. It had a deep quality of resonance as though it would fill with ease a huge cathedral. His patients found great comfort in the timber of that voice. He raised a slim, white hand, a hand so small and shapely as to be almost feminine, and ran it through the thick black hair which rose above his tall forehead.

"Not exactly, Doctor. One of the brethren of St. Sebastian died last night under strange circumstances. I wish you to examine him, and tell me, if you can, the manner of his passing."

"If the man is dead, Father, case is out of my province. If you suspect foul play, you should go to the police."

"They cannot help me, Doctor. I came to you at the instance of a certain high one who recently blessed at your request, three articles, one of which was a bar of virgin silver."

The doctor leaned forward, his eyes growing strangely darker.

"Ah, the Cardinal—"

"Let that high one be nameless, since such is his wish," interrupted the abbot. "Will you lend me your aid?"

For reply, Dr. Catherton touched a button on his desk. "I am engaged for the balance of the day, Miss Troy," he said to the nurse who responded. "If anything comes up, get Blakeslee or Emerson. I will be back tomorrow."

"Yes, Doctor."

As the nurse left the room, the nerve specialist turned to his visitor. "Tell me what happened," he said quietly.

In a few well-chosen words, Father Albert drew a graphic picture of the events of the night before, omitting, however, all reference to the

strange mark on Brother Simon's breast. The doctor removed his gold-rimmed glasses and nervously tapped his teeth with them, his pale blue eyes peering steadily at the black-robed figure before him. When the abbot told of the stolen host, the doctor drew in his breath with a sharp hiss.

"Mother of God!" he exclaimed. "Has it gone that far already?"

He sprang to his feet, grasping the abbot by the arm with a grip whose strength belied his frail appearance. "Come!" he said tersely. "If the host has been stolen, there is no time to lose. You can tell me the rest while we drive."

The abbot rose and followed him from the office. He finished his narrative while the doctor's car tore along the road to Malden. As the car drew up in front of the monastery, the doctor sprang out.

"Where is Brother Simon's body?" he demanded.

"In the chapel before the altar. It is a rule of our monastery that the body of a deceased brother shall lie there for three days before burial. This is to teach the brethren the uncertainty of life and the imminence of death."

"Lead the way."

Before the altar, Dr. Catherton started as his gaze fell on the dead man's distorted features.

"Send the others from the chapel, please," he said quietly.

At a word from the abbot, the two monks who were praying before the altar rose and glided noiselessly from the room. Dr. Catherton bent over the body and stared keenly at it.

"What have you given as the cause of death?" he asked.

"Apoplexy, Doctor."

"It will do. He died, however, of psychic shock; of terror, to put it bluntly. Were there any marks of violence on the body?"

For answer, the abbot opened the robe of the dead monk, Dr. Catherton staggered back as though he had been struck, at the sight of the sinister mark on the white flesh.

"The triple tau!" he cried, his voice vibrant with excitement and with more than a trace of horror. "The mark of Asmodeus! Mother of God, why must such things be allowed to be? Do you realize the significance of this mark, Father?"

"I have studied Roger Bacon," replied the abbot quietly.

"Then you know that a coven of the vilest cult of devil worship that the world has ever known, the cult to which the infamous Giles de Rais belonged, has been formed, and that the Black Mass is again being sung?"

"I fear you are right. Doctor, is that mark the sign of an initiate or of a victim?"

Drawing a scalpel from his bag, Dr. Catherton bent over the body. As the knife touched the livid scar, a strange fetid odor rose on the air. A black stain came on the point of the shining blade, traveling slowly up toward the doctor's hand. From the lips of the dead man came a low wailing moan. The abbot crossed himself in horror, but the doctor, with trembling hands went on with his examination.

"It is fresh," he said as he rose. "It was put on at the moment of his death by some power above those that I know, the same power which now holds the body, and it may be, the soul, in thrall. The secret knowledge of the adepts is loose again in the world."

"May the body be buried in consecrated ground?" asked the abbot.

"It may. Before us lies a martyr of the Church. Tonight, let none watch the altar, nor approach it. You and I must watch alone. It is enough that two lives and two souls be imperiled, and the duty is ours. Now I must return home and arm myself with weapons. We must fight fire with fire and evil with evil's weapons."

A cloud gathered over the abbot's face. "Are not the prayers of the Church weapons against evil?"

"They are, but we will need other aid. The weapons I will use will be blessed by that certain high one we both know."

The abbot bowed his head, his lips murmuring in prayer.

Dr. Catherton entered his waiting car and was driven back toward Boston. He did not go to the city but was driven to a beautiful house set in spacious grounds on the outskirts of Cambridge. He entered the house and went straight to his library, the door of which he opened with a key which he drew from an inner pocket. As soon as he had entered, he locked the door and restored the key to its place.

The room was one which would have made the doctor's patients gasp. It was not the library of a modern doctor of medicine, but the laboratory of an initiate and alchemist of the middle ages. In cases which lined the walls were strange, massive volumes, bound in snakeskin, in ebony, in papyrus, and other strange materials. Over them brooded an aura of age and mystery as though they held secrets too high for the profane gaze of the uninstructed.

In the center of the room stood a brazier, flanked by two grinning human skulls. Over it, suspended on wires so fine as to be invisible in the dim light which pervaded the windowless room, swung a huge

bat. On the draped walls were pictured suns, stars, and crescents. The crowning glory of the room was a huge crystal sphere, a full twelve inches in diameter, clear and colorless as water. Not a single flaw marred its absolute perfection. In it, the whole room showed in miniature, as though it floated in its limpid depths.

Dr. Catherton pressed a wall switch and a dim radiance flooded the room, concentrating in a beam of golden light which fell on a desk in one corner. He advanced to one of the wall cases, considered a moment, and then chose two ponderous tomes which he carried to the desk. The first, bound in brown leather, was printed in heavy black-faced Latin type. The second was hand-inscribed in Hebraic characters.

The doctor opened the two volumes and slowly translated certain passages. As he read, his face grew vacant and an aura of mystery hung over him, until it seemed that he was no longer in the room as a physical entity, but only as a disembodied wraith of some ancient learning. At times his lips moved as though he were in converse with unseen personalities in the room. Presently he moved to the wall case and drew forth a roll of papyrus, painted with tiny hieroglyphs.

"The Book of the Dead," he murmured almost inaudibly. "Even Eliphas Levi, the last of the adepts, and Rabbi Ben Hermon are as children before the mighty wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian Thoth."

Holding the book to his breast, he tossed a handful of incense on the brazier. Clouds of aromatic smoke rose eddying into the quiet air. The doctor bent over the brazier, intoning a ritual in a long dead tongue. Beads of perspiration stood out on his head. The swirling eddies of smoke twisted and began to take nebulous form above his head. He raised his face toward them, still intoning the ancient ritual. The nebulous forms wavered for a moment and then dissipated into formless swirls. The doctor laid down the papyrus roll with a sigh.

"Not yet," he murmured. "The secrets of Mani Hotep, the Priest of Isis, are too well veiled for me to penetrate yet to their fullness. I must seek for aid elsewhere."

He replaced the papyrus roll reverently in its case and took down a quarto volume, hand-written in Latin.

"It all comes back to Roger Bacon in the end," he said as he opened it. "Could I understand all that he has written in this volume, there is nothing more that I would ever need to know."

He found the passage which he sought and read it over again and again.

"Much of it is veiled in allegory," he said with a sigh as he laid down the volume, "yet this have I learned. The Black Mass can be sung only by an adept who has passed through all the cycles and is the apotheosis of evil and wickedness. Such a one I must face this night. Since the stolen host is present, neither the master nor the inferior members of the coven will quail before the consecrated host, as they will ordinarily. The crucifix is powerless before the inverted cross hung above their blood-stained black altar.

"He names certain holy relics which have power, yet none of them are to be had. We must depend on the relic of St. Sebastian in the monastery, and he is silent about it. The only weapons he names which we have are water from the Jordan and oil of myrrh, each of which must be blessed by one who has never harbored heretical doubts and who has never been in mortal sin since baptism. I have those items, prepared against this day and blessed by one who is high, indeed. Whether he is sinless, this night will tell."

From a wall case he took two bottles which he placed in his pockets. Locking the door carefully behind him, he left the house and entered his car. At the monastery, he was taken directly to the abbot who welcomed him gravely.

"You have done as I requested, Father?" asked the doctor.

"I have. This is the first time since the founding of the monastery that the chapel has not been open to those who wished to worship."

"There is present in the chapel that which should not be worshipped. Let us make preparations for our vigil."

In the chapel, the doctor placed a screen to one side of the altar. From his pocket he took a bottle of clear amber fluid. He moistened the tip of his finger and drew a line of the liquid around each of the outer edges of the screen. In each panel, he marked a large cross.

"For our protection," he said to the abbot. "Nothing evil can pass that mark."

With his moistened finger he drew a circle on the floor around the screen and two chairs which he placed behind it. As a final measure, he touched his wrists, his breast over his heart, and his forehead, with the liquid. When he attempted to do the same thing to the abbot, Father Albert objected.

"The prayers of the Holy Church are the only protection I desire," he said shortly. "If they fail, I care not what happens."

Dr. Catherton shrugged. "I hope that my precautions are needless," he said, "yet they are the part of wisdom. If you will not be protected,

be sure that you do not move out of the circle I have drawn. Now compose yourself for rest. We have a long wait before us."

The hours passed slowly in the dimly lighted chapel. Father Albert had had little sleep the night before, and despite his feeling of tenseness, he caught himself drowsing. He came to with a start. Dr. Catherton had his finger pressed to his lips. The abbot listened and his heart beat more rapidly as a faint wail like a distant wind sounded through the chapel. He peered out through the screen and an exclamation almost burst unbidden from his lips.

About the body of Brother Simon a lambent blue flame was playing. It glowed brilliantly for moment and then grew murky and dull, as though an evil force and a good were warring for supremacy. Gradually the brightness of the flame died and a murky red glow took its place. Phosphorescent streamers rose from the dead monk's chest and formed themselves in the air into the sinister emblem of the triple tau. The bier creaked. Father Albert's scalp tingled as the body rose to a sitting posture and then slid off the bier and stood on its feet.

With head drawn back and unseeing eyes, the dead monk walked slowly up the steps to the altar. His hand reached out for the host, but he drew it back as though the consecrated water had stung him. The wailing sound came louder and the hand again went forward. This time it grasped the host. Carrying the wafer, the body walked down the steps and across the chapel. Dr. Catherton pressed the abbot's arm as a signal to remain quiet, and rose to his feet and followed. Despite the doctor's warning, Father Albert followed him, his lips moving in prayer.

Straight across the chapel the dead monk moved. His hand went forth and opened the door which led to the street. As he stepped forth from the monastery, the doctor and the abbot were only a step behind. On the walk stood a cloaked figure who reached out a hand for the host. The monk extended it toward him. As his hand closed on it, Father Albert gave a cry. Pushing the doctor aside, he sprang at the stranger.

With a cry of dismay, Dr. Catherton strove to place his body between the abbot and the stranger. He was too late. The stranger stretched forth his hand toward the abbot. From it came a flash of lurid flame. Father Albert gave a choking cry and fell forward, his hands grasping at nothingness. Over his face and breast played a strange phosphorescent glow.

The stranger turned toward the doctor. Again the flame shot forth from his hand. It enveloped the doctor's form but rebounded harm-

illustration by Amos Sewell



Father Albert gave a choking cry and fell forward, his hands grasping at nothingness.

lessly. With a cry of rage, the stranger sprang forward. As his hand reached out to grasp the doctor, his foot struck the body of Brother Simon, which had fallen as soon as the host had left its hand. He staggered for a moment and then fell headlong. Dr. Catherton dashed forward with a bottle of clear liquid in his hand. He dashed a portion of the contents on the prostrate form of the stranger. It hissed, and flames shot up into the air. With a howl of pain and rage, he rose to his feet and fled away into the night.

The doctor now turned his attention to the fallen abbot. He still moved feebly, his hands clawing at the ground and the strange flame playing over him. Dr. Catherton poured a few drops of liquid from his bottle into his hand and smeared it on the abbot's face. The flame was instantly extinguished. Quickly the doctor sprinkled the rest of the contents of the bottle over him. The abbot's convulsive movements ceased. Slowly his head, which had been drawn back, came forward to a normal position, and he groaned feebly.

A sound of running feet came from the interior of the monastery. The doctor stepped back into the chapel.

"Stop!" he cried as the first of the monks came into sight. "Where is the prior?"

Brother Anselm stepped forward.

"Bid the brethren to remain where they are until you go outside and learn the wishes of your abbot," said the doctor.

The prior followed him through the door. He gave a cry of dismay as his gaze fell on the prostrate form of the abbot. The doctor bent forward and spoke slowly and distinctly.

"Can you hear me, Father?" he asked.

The abbot groaned slightly and nodded.

"Your prior is here to receive your orders," the doctor went on. "Don't try to speak. Nod if you approve the orders which I give. All of the brethren are to retire to their cells and remain there in prayer until they are summoned. Brother Anselm and I will carry you to your cell."

The abbot nodded. "Such is my will," came faintly from his lips.

The prior bowed and stepped back into the chapel. He returned in a moment.

"The brethren are dismissed to their cells," he said.

"Then help me bear the body of Brother Simon back to its place before the altar," said the doctor.

The two men picked up the body of the dead monk and replaced it on the bier from which it had risen a few minutes before. They raised the groaning abbot and bore him tenderly to his cell. Dr. Catherton opened his black bag and took out a hypodermic syringe. In a few moments a flush came on the abbot's chalky face and he strove to sit up.

"Remain quiet, Father," said the doctor soothingly. "You will be stronger in a few minutes. May I still give orders in your name?"

"Brother Anselm," said the abbot in a stronger voice, "obey the doctor's orders as though they were my own."

The prior crossed his arms and bowed deeply.

"Have all of the brethren of the monastery enter this room singly," said the doctor. "Warn them that they are to say farewell to their abbot, who is near death. Open his robe so that they may see his chest."

Hesitatingly the prior stepped to the abbot and opened his robe. He recoiled in horror at what he saw. Branded on the white flesh in livid lines, was the sign of the triple tau. The sign gleamed with a dull light of its own. From the abbot rose an odor of evil, an odor reminiscent of burning sulphur and of raw blood.

"Obey my orders and ask no questions!" said the doctor sharply.

The prior composed his face with an effort and left the cell. One by one, the monks entered. The abbot lay with closed eyes. Each monk, with a word of prayer, and many with a falling tear—and some with a glance of mild bewilderment at the strange mark—gazed on his prostrate form and left the cell.

The tenth man to enter gave a sudden start as his gaze fell on the fatal mark. Involuntarily his right hand went up in a peculiar gesture. Hardly had he made the motion than the doctor had him by the arm with a grip of steel.

"Close the door!" he cried to the prior.

The monk's face grew livid and he strove to wriggle from the doctor's grasp. The doctor held him fast and turning him about, glared intently into his eyes. The doctor's eyes were so dark as to appear almost black, and they glittered with a strange intensity. The monk struggled against their hypnotic power but he was helpless. His struggles ceased and he gazed as if fascinated. Without letting his gaze waver, the doctor drew a small crystal from his pocket. He waved it back and forth between his face and the monk's and finally brought it to rest before the monk's eyes. Slowly he withdrew his eyes, leaving the monk's gaze riveted on the crystal. The doctor set it on a table and the monk's eyes followed it.

"What is this man's name?" asked the doctor in an undertone.

"Brother Clement," replied the prior.

The doctor's sonorous voice boomed out, filling the cell with a roar of sound.

"Brother Clement," he said impressively, "you will hear, answer, and obey me."

"I will hear, answer, and obey," came the answer in a toneless voice.

"Open your robe."

The monk threw open his black robe. On his chest was branded the mark of the triple tau.

"Who, besides yourself, is so marked in this monastery?" asked the doctor.

"No one."

"Have others been sought as initiates?"

"None as yet."

"What is master of your coven?"

The monk hesitated, but the doctor's voice repeated the question in a tone which admitted of no evasion.

"Asmodeus," came the answer.

"He is the titular master, of course. Who is the virtual master?"

"Asmodeus, himself."

"Mother of God!" murmured the doctor under his breath. The monk shuddered.

"Where is your chapel?"

"I cannot tell. Before my lips could form the words, I would lie dead at your feet."

"Then you must lead us to it."

"Then I must lead you to it," was the answer in a dull monotone.

"When will the Black Mass again be celebrated?"

"This night, at the hour of dawn."

"Can we reach there in time?"

"Yes."

"Then lead and I will follow."

The monk turned like an automation and started toward the door. Father Albert staggered to his feet.

The monk stopped in his stride. Dr. Catherton and the prior looked inquiringly at the ashen-faced abbot.

"This concerns my monastery," said Father Albert. "I will go with you."

"You can't," replied the doctor. "Your condition admits of no such excitement."

"Nevertheless, I will go," said the abbot positively. "If my soul is called from this world, it will be of little moment. I cannot live, shirking my duty."

"He will go Doctor," said the prior in an undertone. "I know that tone."

The doctor shrugged; he drew a stethoscope from his bag and applied it to the abbot's chest.

"If you go," he said quietly, "I will not be responsible for your life. At least, let me protect you as I am protected."

He drew the bottle of amber liquid from his coat pocket. The abbot looked at it questioningly. "What is it?"

"Oil of myrrh," replied the doctor. "It was one of three things blessed together by a high one who is free from sin. One was a bottle of water from the Jordan which saved your life this night, one was a bar of silver, and this is the third."

"Then apply it in the name of the Holy Trinity!" cried the abbot.

Dr. Catherton moistened his finger with the precious substance and marked a cross on the abbot's breast over his heart, on his wrists, and on his forehead. Brother Anselm gave a cry of astonishment as the oil was applied to his superior's breast. Where the holy oil touched the mark of the triple tau, the livid scar faded and became invisible.

Father Albert drew his robe around him and turned to the doctor. "I am ready," he announced.

At a word from the doctor, Brother Clement moved forward through the door of the abbot's cell and along the corridor which led to the monastery entrance. Outside the building he paused.

"It will be necessary to drive," he said tonelessly. "The chapel is many miles from here."

At a word from the abbot, the prior darted off to get the monastery's car. When it was brought around, Dr. Catherton slid into the driver's seat, the hypnotized monk beside him. The car moved off through the night toward the ocean. North along the shore they drove toward Nahant. Presently the doctor swung the car off into a side road, rugged and uneven. He drove for over a mile before he stopped the car.

The three men got out. With the monk leading the way, they crossed a field toward a rocky escarpment, beyond which could be heard the sea. They climbed the rocky wall and looked down on the turbulent ocean far below them. The sea wall looked to be too rough for climbing, but the monk went forward and started the descent. The path proved to be practicable. They climbed down until they were below the high tide mark on the cliff. The monk turned to his left and disappeared.

"It is here, Father," whispered Dr. Catherton in an undertone of great excitement.

The abbot nodded and followed him into a cave in the face of the rock. It was dark at the mouth, but from around a bend a few feet from them, came a murky red glow. The bottom of the cave sloped

upward sharply. From ahead and above them, the black figure of Brother Clement was just disappearing around the curve.

With an exclamation of consternation, the doctor ran forward, the abbot at his heels. They scrambled up the sharp slope and rounded the curve. Before them in the rocky cave was a chapel, but such a chapel as neither of them had ever seen before. The walls were draped with black, with here and there the emblem of the triple tau marked in dull, murky red. On the far side was a black-draped altar behind which rose a huge inverted cross. Instead of the figure of the Man of Calvary, pinned on the cross was the naked body of a young girl, partially disemboweled. On either side of the altar were hideously obscene statues. The abbot shuddered and crossed himself at the sight of them. Over all played a lurid red flame, emerging from braziers set around the cavern.

Before the altar stood a crimson-robed figure, his hands raised in a grim travesty of a pontifical blessing. On the floor knelt eleven black-clad figures, in silent adoration of the abominations displayed before them. The high priest of diabolism raised his head at Brother Clement's entrance. He extended one claw-like hand toward him and a pale red flame flickered from his fingers.

"You are late!" he cried to the renegade monk, in a voice whose tone reminded the abbot of the hissing of a serpent.

Brother Clement stood motionless under the spell which the doctor's hypnotic powers had thrown over him. The priest took a step forward, but paused as the figures of Dr. Catherton and the abbot came into view.

"Up!" he hissed to the kneeling worshippers. "Here are voluntary sacrifices!"

The kneeling initiates sprang to their feet and faced the intruders. A low intense growl of bestial rage came from them. Slowly and menacingly they began to move forward.

"Stop!" boomed out the doctor's resonant voice. "Unless you wish to join your Grand Master in his regions of torment, pause before you dare to attack us."

For a moment, the black-clad figures paused. At a cry from the priest, they flung themselves forward. With a single motion, the doctor swung the aged abbot behind him. From the breast of his coat he drew a thin gold case elaborately carved and surmounted by a tiny crucifix. He held the case out before him. At the sight of the sacred relic of St. Sebastian, the initiates paused irresolutely. The doctor made a step forward,

holding out the relic, and crying in a loud voice a long-forgotten exorcism in medieval Latin.

The initiates retreated before his steady advance, but the high priest came forward from the altar, a horrible grin showing on his dark face. He stretched out his hand toward the doctor. From it came a bolt of lurid red flame. It leaped through the air like a sword and enveloped the figures of the doctor and the Abbot. The priest dropped his hand and watched to see his victims fall. An expression of amazement replaced the grin as he saw the doctor keeping up his steady advance, his sonorous voice rolling out the Latin phrases of the exorcism.

The priest gave a cry of baffled rage and again extended his hand. The red flame rushed out and filled the end of the chapel. The form of the renegade Brother Clement was near enough to receive a portion of the fire. He fell, screaming horribly, his hands grasping at the air, and his head drawn back. Neither the doctor nor the abbot were affected. With a bestial scream, the priest leaped forward through the flames, his claw-like hands outstretched to grasp his victims.

Dr. Catherton thrust the gold case containing the holy relic into his pocket and took out the bottle of amber-colored liquid. He drew the cork and waited. As the priest grasped him with talon-like fingers, he dashed the holy oil of myrrh full into his saturnine, diabolical face.

A horrible scream of pain and disappointed rage came from the priest. He swayed for a moment, and then fell forward. From his prone body, a shape of terror, outlined in lurid red flame, rose into the air. It hovered for a moment over the body. Tearing itself loose, it sped about the chapel, touching object after object of the horrible paraphernalia of devil-worship. Each object that it touched crumpled and fell in a pile of ashes.

The initiates had watched their leader with hope and with confidence until he fell. When the shape of flame arose, with despairing wails, they fled the cave.

The flame approached and hovered for a moment over Dr. Catherton and the abbot, striving to reach them with its destroying touch. All its efforts were unavailing. With a final wail of rage and despair, it fled from the cave into the outer air.

Dr. Catherton bent over the form of Brother Clement, beside whom the kneeling abbot was telling his beads.

"He has joined his Grand Master," he said after a brief examination. "It is well that he has done so. He spoke truth when he said that Asmodeus himself was virtual master of this coven. We have robbed him

of his earthly body, and God grant that it be long before he gets another."

"But you have invaded their place of worship and destroyed their leader," exclaimed the abbot. "Is there more to be done?"

"There were twelve besides Asmodeus himself in this coven," replied the doctor, "and but one of them has been destroyed. I know not how far into the secrets of evil the others have penetrated, but we must hunt them down, one by one, and destroy them. The lore of the adepts has been lost, save to an instructed few, and modern science is too blind to admit that such things can be. Father, you and I must wage a lone battle against them with aid of that high one who is without sin, yet who was wise enough to bless our weapons. Those things and our books are our only weapons. God grant us final victory."

"Amen!" said the abbot reverently.



The Death of Bolster

THE legend is told of the strange wooing and peculiar death of the famous Giant Bolster, who lived near Chapel Porth in Cornwall. However it may have happened, Bolster fell deeply in love with St. Agnes, a woman who is reputed to have been very beautiful and a model of virtue. He allowed the lady no repose, but followed her incessantly, proclaiming his love and filling the heavens with his tempestuous sighs and groans.

St. Agnes lectured the gigantic Bolster in vain on the impropriety of his conduct, especially as he was already a married man, but her words availed nothing, and neither did her prayers. So the persecuted lady in desperation evolved the following stratagem to get rid of him:

She pretended to be persuaded of the intensity of Bolster's love, but told him she required yet one small proof more. If Bolster would go to the hole that existed in the cliff at the termination of the valley at Chapel Porth, and would fill this hole with his blood, she would no longer look coldly on him. The Giant Bolster thought that it was but an easy thing that was required of him, and felt that he could fill many such holes and be none the weaker for the loss of blood. So, going to the place, and stretching his arm across the hole, he plunged his knife into a vein

and watched a torrent of blood issue forth. Roaring and seething the blood fell to the bottom, and the giant expected very soon to see the hole fill up, and so pass the last test of his devotion.

The hole required much more blood than he had supposed; but nevertheless he allowed himself to bleed on, expecting it would not be long. But hour after hour the blood flowed from the vein, and still the hole was not filled.

It never was to be. At last the Giant fainted from the weakness caused by his loss of blood. Once, for a moment, the extraordinary vitality in his mighty frame allowed him to come to, but he lacked the strength to lift himself from the ground, and under the circumstances he was unable to staunch the wound he had made. Soon he was dead.

The cunning St. Agnes was well aware in proposing this task to Bolster that the hole opened at the bottom into the sea, and that as rapidly as the blood flowed into the hole it would pour into the boundless reservoir of the ocean.

So runs the legend.

It is interesting to note that to this day this hole may be seen at Chapel Porth, and that this hole is marked with the same red stain said to have been left by the path of the Giant's blood.

The Last Archer

by Earl Peirce, jr.

FIFTH DAY (AT SEA). It has been five days since I made the acquaintance of William Farquhar. Five days! It seems like more than a lifetime. I am richer now than ever before in my career, for he pays me generously. But what a strange business! Who is this man? Where is he taking me?

He tells me nothing, and yet in his glance there is a wisdom to answer all questions of all ages, if it could but speak. There is a sadness about him, a hopelessness foreign to other men. He talks to me of poetry, of battles, and the history of great crusades; but of himself, never a word.

Night after night, on this nearly inaccessible island, the being called William Farquhar fought his never-ending duel . . .

Perhaps I should be afraid of him; perhaps I should resign from his employment. Yet I am curious.

When he first came to my room on that black night, as if he had emerged from the very shadows about me, he laid ten thousand dollars on my desk and told me it was his retainer. His retainer! His word is true, for he has since doubled the sum, and promised me more when my task is finished. But this task of mine? I feel I am cheating him.

It is not really a task, for any engineer could do it better than I. He desires me to install an electric generator in his island home, a generator which he bade me purchase, and for which he paid a small fortune. He told me to buy all accessories, for I must install the machine by myself, without help of any kind. At this very moment the generator is in the hold below deck, and with it those many queer boxes which Farquhar himself directed over from the wharf.

We have been at sea for three days, and it is now early evening of the third. My stateroom is comfortable to the point of luxury. I have no wants, save the answers to countless questions. But I must wait for the answers.

We are now cruising in the Gulf Stream, and the weather is mildly warm, although it is midwinter. The boat makes good headway, the service is exceptional, the passengers interesting and cordial. Today I met several people, and all of them questioned me about Farquhar. So it seems that I am not alone in my curiosity about this strange man.

Nor has the captain himself overlooked my companion's eccentricities. At dinner this evening he engaged me in discreet conversation, and asked several blunt questions. "Why," he said, "does your friend, Mr. Farquhar, never come for his meals? Why does he lock himself in his room all day long, leaving it only after sundown?"

Why indeed? Five days ago I met him, and during all of that time I have never once seen him taste a morsel of food, nor have I obtained a glimpse of him during the hours of sunlight. Why this erratic behavior? What does he hide behind the locked doors of his stateroom?

Of Farquhar's business I know nothing. I even doubt if he has one, for he possesses the careless air of a wealthy sportsman. Yes, Farquhar must certainly be a sportsman, for his body is lean and agile, and he is muscular, with a decided swiftness of line. His face too—he has a weather-beaten face of tough leather, and his eyes are permanently narrowed, as of a man who has spent long hours facing winds and rain. Sportsman? I might better suggest, *hunter*.

Where is he taking me? The question pounds incessantly at my ear-

drums. To some island, he once told me. But *what* island? I have questioned the captain and found that our route is dotted with small islands, inhabited and uninhabited, civilized and barbarous. And only this evening I learned that the ship was steaming off her main course, headed into sparsely charted seas.

"Farquhar's millions," said the purser with a smile. "The orders have come direct from the New York Office."

So it appears that Farquhar has changed the course of this great ship to suit his ends. It becomes stranger with each passing hour . . .

I have just this moment received word from the captain. We are at last approaching our destination, for Farquhar has laid his maps on the chart table and given his instructions. Our speed has been cut in half; passengers line the rail and peer vainly into the darkness of the surrounding water.

I have been requested to pack my luggage and prepare to assist in the disembarkation. A voltaic tension seems to have come over the entire boat; the night air is hushed by it.

Ah! Captain Lionel sent word again. Farquhar has ordered the ship to a position three miles due north. There is a solitary island there, as indicated on the map: *Durance Island*. A mere speck of ink in the whole ocean! We shall disembark at Durance Island . . .

I must hurry and record these final impressions. My steward is packing for me, and the crane on deck is flooded with light. They have already begun to lift our luggage from the hold. Through the open window I can hear the seamen's voices, oddly strained. Above them I can hear Farquhar, softly decisive. The screws are throbbing gently, like the whispered comment of hundreds of passengers.

Well, I have learned that four boats are to be lowered. Four! It appears that Farquhar has no servants on Durance Island, for it is a black mass out there, almost swallowed by the sky and sea.

My bags have been taken out on deck. I can hear the squeak of pulleys as the boats are lowered. It is almost time to depart. I am here in my stateroom, alone with my diary—a diary which some impulse caused me to prepare on the night I first met this man and learned his uncanny request.

What can I say? What parting words can I write? What impressions?

The steward has just knocked at my door. I must hurry.

Hurry! They tell me to hurry, for Farquhar has commanded that the complete disembarkation take place before an hour of dawn.

What will I find on Durance Island? What does Farquhar want with the generator? These, and other questions, shoot through my head. I must ask myself: Who is Farquhar? I must rephrase the question: *What is Farquhar?*

SKITH DAY (A CONTINUATION FROM LAST NIGHT.)
If I should live to be a thousand I could never forget the things I have seen in the past twenty-four hours. They are bizarre and weird beyond all comparison. In ways they frighten me; yet still I am intrigued and curious.

To describe in detail all I have seen would exhaust my ability. It exhausts my tired mind even to think of them. Yet, however fatigued, I dare not lie down tonight until I have recorded, in some manner, the chronology of these strange events.

The *S. S. Celtic* dropped anchor at ten o'clock last night within several hundred yards of Durance Island. There was no moon, and it was slightly foggy, and heavy billows rolled the sea, although not large enough to endanger the four boats which transported us to the shore. By midnight all of our luggage had been removed from the *Celtic*, and we had made our salutations to the captain.

Even before I set a foot on the beach, I felt the impregnability of this place. In that darkness I could discern no landmarks save the towering blackness of the cliffs, and could hear but the lapping of the waves upon its shore; yet I sensed its presence more than I saw or heard it. The seamen who manned our boats experienced the same eerie sensation, for I could not help but notice the half-sluggish reluctance with which they pulled the oars.

Farquhar was standing in the bow of the farthest boat, his arms crossed on his massive chest. He issued terse commands to the men, and as we neared the island I saw his head go higher and higher as he gazed at the cliff-top. Strangely enough, his attitude seemed that of brave defiance. Defiance of what? Of whom? It was impossible for me to say.

When Farquhar's boat scraped the beach he leaped out and gave immediate aid in hauling it aground. He fairly jerked the craft from the water onto the sand, then waded in to his waist and assisted the others.

Not many minutes after my foot first touched the soil, I became alarmingly aware of Durance Island's unnatural silence. Disregarding the grunts of the men, and Farquhar's commands, and the wash of the sea, Durance Island was a place of uncanny silence. There was not a single

chirping of an insect, not a creaking bough, not a noise from its darkness. It was absolutely and hauntingly *soundless*.

But I had no time to linger over these things. The boats had been unloaded and the various odd crates and boxes were lined up under flash-lanterns so that Farquhar might examine them.

I walked over by the group of men who stood anxiously awaiting further orders, and caught the glance of one grizzled sailor whom I recognized as a lesser officer. There was a look of mingled wonder and fear in his eyes, which seemed to pop them from his head. He looked squarely back at me for several seconds, then turned his head toward the sea. I saw his lips tremble as they choked back the words which had risen uncontrollably to his mouth.

I was about to speak to him when suddenly I saw the same thing that he had seen. It struck me with a quick panic, and my knees weakened as if their tendons had been severed. For lying on the ground by a cluster of other boxes was a long black box with two metal handles on each side by which it might be lifted. It was oblong in shape, slightly over six feet long, and obviously quite ancient. In the glow of the lanterns I perceived the metallic glint of hinges on one side of the upper surface.

Perhaps all of the men had noticed this singularly coffin-shaped crate, and when the time came to transport the luggage to the top of the cliff they shunned it as they would shun Pandora's box. Farquhar himself lifted that crate to his shoulders and with comparative ease led the men up the mountainous path.

It was a tricky, dangerous climb. Alternate men held lanterns to light the way and warn us of its countless cracks and fissures. In fifteen minutes the ten of us emerged from the overhanging rock arbors to the summit of the cliff, and stopped there, exhausted, while the seabreeze played over our sweating faces.

After a few minutes' rest Farquhar shouldered his box and led the men farther on, climbing still upward. I was just behind him with my personal luggage, and was the first of the men to see our destination. I stopped so short in surprise that the man behind me collided into my back with a grunt.

Before us, on top of an incline, rose the black cheerless wall of a stone castle, humped with parapets and crowned with a single lofty tower. It was a bulky castle of thick stone, compact to such a degree that it appeared solid. There was not a single light shining from it, and no sign of inhabitation or activity.

Farquhar, almost at the castle's wall, stopped and turned around. He jerked his head for us to follow, then lowered his crate to the ground with tender care. I saw his face in the feeble glow of the lamplight, and cannot well enough describe the exalted defiance that seemed written there.

I shall not take the pains to relate of the long and torturous vigil as the eight men, Farquhar and I traced up and down the path, hauling strange boxes to the castle, and of the one man who slipped and fell, dashing his head to pulp on the rocks below. Nor need I say how eagerly the seamen finally shoved their boats back into the water and rowed to the *Celtic*. For all of these things lose their importance from what I am yet to relate, of that second stone castle which stood on an identical cliff on the opposite side of the island.

When the last boat had pulled away from our shore, and when we saw the lights of the steamship as it moved through the water, a hitherto unnoticeable sensation of familiarity came between Farquhar and me. He discarded his cloak of remote sovereignty and grasped my shoulders in a brotherly gesture.

"You are not to be afraid," he said. "This is a queer place, but hospitable and quiet. Your work on the generator should not take you more than three or four days, and within a week the *Celtic* will pick you up on her return voyage. I regret that you can have no manual assistance in your task, but you and I are the sole inhabitants of this castle—which I have named Camelot. You are my welcome guest; I shall do everything to make your stay pleasant."

He led me up the time-worn steps to the upper hall, to my bedroom which had doubtless been prepared in advance of my coming. At this time it was almost three o'clock, pitch black outside, and deathly silent.

I went immediately to the luxurious bed and dropped on it with a sigh of utter exhaustion. Farquhar was most sympathetic and considerate, having brought to my room a decanter of excellent brandy and a box of cigarettes.

"Following my usual custom," he said, "I shall be unapproachable during the hours of sunlight, and so tomorrow you will be quite alone in Camelot; yet have no fear. I have left instructions on the table in the library concerning the generator, and you will find, in the morning, a well-stocked kitchen. Please adapt yourself to these irregularities of etiquette, and make yourself as comfortable as you may."

He bade me good-night and left the room. I heard his footsteps as he went back downstairs; then I swallowed a glass of cognac and prepared for bed. But once beneath the silken coverlet I could not sleep,

and had no wish to do so. I lay with my head upon my folded hands staring up at the blackness of the room. My brain raced ahead of itself trying to piece together these things which I had done and seen.

Not more than an hour later I heard Farquhar's tread on the stone floor outside. Aroused from the lethargy into which I had fallen, I slipped out of bed and tiptoed to the door. I drew back the bolt quietly, and opened the door scarcely an inch.

Coming up the steps from below, illuminated by a lantern in one hand, was Farquhar. His huge body was draped in a black cape, and his head and face were hidden by a cowl. In his spare hand he held an enormous longbow and a sheaf of arrows. He passed unsuspecting across my door and vanished into the gloom of the hallway adjacent.

A pang of sudden fear shot through me at this moment, for Farquhar's tread had been so stealthy, so determined, that I sensed something *vicious* in his actions. I locked the door and went fumbling toward my suitcase, wherein was my sole defense against this man—an automatic Luger.

I was at the foot of my bed when suddenly I stopped. I looked incredulously through the open window; then I raced to the sill and stood staring into the blackness of the island.

There was a lighted lantern out there—a solitary lantern hanging in the darkness. I peered closer, and as my eyes widened, I saw the vague, mist-enshrouded outline of a castle. I saw that the lantern was hanging from the castle wall.

How far away this dwelling was I could not determine because of the darkness. It seemed to stand on the prominence of a cliff, just as Farquhar's castle stood. On the top was a tall machicolated tower, as there was on Camelot. A sort of fog hung over the castle, twisting and warping its bulky walls as a nightmare twists and warps a vision. But clearly I saw its lantern glowing brighter, and dimming suddenly as wreaths of fog closed over it.

I stood looking at this uncanny dwelling for only a few seconds, when I saw a shadowy figure appear on its balcony, dim, hazy, minute, yet the black figure of a man standing on the parapeted balcony.

At that moment I heard the scraping of Farquhar's feet on the stone near by. I leaned out of the window and glanced along the side of the castle. There he was, not ten feet away from me, standing on an identical parapeted balcony. He was like a cowed phantom, his sharp eyes staring intently at the castle opposite. Then he, too, must have seen that hazy figure, for he stood motionless for several horrible seconds, then leaned

forward and drew an arrow from the quiver by his feet. He notched it in his bow-string.

I was scarcely able to credit my senses as I watched this weird spectacle. My gaze was torn between Farquhar and that man across the way, and the powerful longbow in Farquhar's hands.

My host moved closer to the parapet and leaned out. He was slightly inclined as he sought out that man's position; then suddenly he straightened upright and raised the bow to his shoulder. His Herculean arms drew it out and back, bent it in a huge arc. He raised his pointed chin and took careful aim.

I moved back as the arrow shot like a bullet from his bow. Upward and out it went, a hissing, wicked shaft of unerring death for whomever it might strike. And I waited in breathless terror to hear the shriek of its victim.

But not Farquhar's arrow alone shot into that night, for less than a second afterward I heard the faint twang of a second bow-string, and the head of a second arrow thudded into the stone wall below my window.

I jumped back in alarm, my pistol raised in my hands. I cowered beside the window, listening, fearing at any moment to see an arrow—from whose bow I cannot say—fly like death past my shoulders.

After two minutes of silence I became less cautious and ventured to look through the window. The figure on the opposite castle was standing upright, and I could discern his movements as he selected a second arrow for his bow. I then turned to Farquhar, and saw that he, too, was notching another deadly missile, and stepping closer to the parapet.

In dull amazement I drew back from the window and dropped on the bed. Two archers! Two nightly archers fighting each other to the death from two opposing castles on a deserted isle! What a nightmarish thing! What a bizarre thing!

I dropped the Luger onto the bed and took my head in my hands. My mind was shaking with disbelief, it throbbed from fatigue. But I could not force out the sounds of Farquhar's slashing bowstrings, nor the repeated thuds of his enemy's arrows as they shot back into the walls of Camelot.

When I awoke from a deep sleep late this morning, I had almost forgotten the strange battle which Farquhar and this nameless man waged silently across the island. It was nearly midday, the sunlight streamed in warm rays through the window, and the ocean breeze came pleasantly to my nostrils. My head was clear, but I felt insufferably hungry.

As I bathed and dressed I was annoyed by this place's unearthly

silence. I felt that there was no other human being on this whole island save myself. And most of all I regretted the strange lack of servants.

Before I left my room, I glanced out on the balcony beside my window. I saw that its floor was cracked and crumbly, and that it was nicked where arrows had struck. Buried in the walls, above and below, were splintered arrows. But of Farquhar there was no trace.

I spent several minutes staring at the castle outside. It was small and compact, perhaps not five hundred yards' distance from Camelot. Between the two castles was a swampy forest of strange vegetation. There was no sound down there. The sickening miasma of stagnation drifted to my window.

I went to the kitchen and made my breakfast.

After having washed and dried the dishes, I was aware that the kitchen of Camelot was a place equipped to serve but one—myself. All of the food and cooking-utensils were new; they had just recently been unpacked by Farquhar himself. His empty pantry was cobwebbed and dusty from disuse.

Could I any longer doubt that this man never ate a meal?

I went directly to the library and read the instructions which he had left there for me. In a handwriting swift and scratched, on vellum parchment, he told me of the manner in which he desired that I install the generator. And from his wording, I suspected that he knew far more of technical electricity than even I did.

He also wished me a good-morning, and repeated his hospitable request that I make myself at home among his possessions. As a final point, reminding me of the death of the *Celtic's* seaman last night, he advised me not to leave the castle. He would, he said, meet me again after sundown.

Almost at once I felt a surging wonder. Where was Farquhar? Where and *how* did he keep himself during the daytime? And the answer to my questions came to me as I remembered the stories told of vampires. . . .

I searched the basement floor of Camelot and found neither hide nor hair of the man. I went to the dungeons where shattered wooden slats and excelsior littered the floor, and still no trace. I smelled the stench of damp earth, and was sent up again by driving fears. I then went to the balcony where he had stood firing his arrows, and saw only the *other's* arrows chinked in the walls. Finally I climbed the steps to the tower and saw Farquhar lying fast asleep in the black wooden coffin—the same coffin which he himself had carried up the rocky path.

I looked closely at his body, a great long body wrapped in a black mantle. His face was grim and peaceful, a sharp, large-boned face with a wolfish jaw. There was a greenish tint to his skin, and his thin lips were almost black. But I did not feel fear.

Farquhar's kindness needed no further demonstration. Although aloof, he had been generous and cordial. Yet as I turned my back to descend the stairs, I thought: Perhaps I am an unforgivable fool for not tearing his heart out as he lies here at my mercy!

I had no wish to disregard Farquhar's warning that I do not leave the castle, but as I stepped out of the front door and surveyed the scene before me, I had a desperate urge to pocket my Luger and explore the place.

I was surprised at first to see how small Durance Island was. From where I stood I could see the ocean in every direction. Directly ahead of me, even closer than I had imagined from my window, the second castle reared its battle-scarred tower into the sky like a deformed finger pointing. I could see that this castle was worn and ancient, just as Farquhar's was. I wondered what type of man it was who held domination there—alone or with others, I knew not which—but who lived as Farquhar lived and fired his arrows as Farquhar did.

There was no sign of life or habitation in the dwelling; it was as lifeless as Camelot behind me. Between these medieval places the jungle of trees grew like a solid barrier.

I then turned my observation back to Camelot and walked slowly about its base, wondering how inconceivably ancient it was. In the ground outside were arrows, half-way buried in the earth, others stuck in the walls, others lay splintered as they had bounded from the battlements. I saw huge stone buttresses, like massive oaks, sprawled against the tower. Some little grass and a few brown shrubs grew close by, but no flowers. In the rear the cliff dropped a jagged three hundred feet to the sea.

I shaded my eyes against the sun. Out on this water, for countless miles in every direction, white breakers rose and fell like snarling lips. No other land was visible save Durance Island, upon which I stood. No sign of the *Celtic*.

It was after three o'clock before I went back to the castle and prepared a light luncheon. I then re-read Farquhar's instructions about the generator, and went below to refer to my notes and blueprints. Farquhar himself came down a little after six o'clock, and expressed his good wishes at finding me all ready to install the machine.

While I ate supper, which he helped me prepare, I could hardly resist

the urge to ask him outright of the castle opposite, and of its uncanny archer-lord. But something about him, as he studied my lowered lids, frightened me off.

Tonight the silent battle raged violently between these two men. I sat for hours watching Farquhar train his bow across the marsh and let his arrows fly with deadly swiftness. He seemed unaware of my scrutiny—oblivious of everyone and everything excepting that dim figure across the way. Arrow after arrow he fired into the night, and arrow after arrow shot back deep-headed around him. What ghastly mirade, I wondered, is it that prevents Farquhar from being stabbed a thousand times!

I trained my observation upon the man in the castle opposite, but it was too dark to distinguish his features. I saw only a blurred dark figure, cloaked as Farquhar was cloaked, bending his bow and letting his arrows fly, time after time.

There was hardly a sound as these men worked their mad game. The sea crashed distantly below us, the bow-strings played their own shrill sonata, but from Farquhar himself there was no noise—no despair exhibited in his actions, no malice and no impatience. Each time he drew on his bow, his chin was raised high and a curious light invaded his sunken eyes. And when his shaft fell short he simply lowered his head as he reached for another.

Once after midnight, an arrow flew straight to Farquhar's arm and pierced it through, so that half was sticking in and half was out. He stopped and grimaced, not from apparent pain but from annoyance, and grasping the shaft by its head, he pulled it all the way through his arm and flung it over the parapet. Without again glancing at the hole thus torn in his flesh, he notched an arrow in his bow-string, drew it back to his shoulder and let it spring like a panther into the night.

All of these things I saw; then I sickened and turned away from the window. I am still sick from the sight of it, and hardly able to hold the pen in my hand. . . .

It is late, and I have been sitting here for hours. Tonight I have written far more than I had planned; yet I do not feel that I have written enough. Even at this moment I can hear Farquhar outside, and hear the other arrows as they shoot back from across the island. Perhaps one will fly through the window and strike me dead.

Ah, I am so fatigued! It is all like a fabulous dream, but I know it is not. Farquhar no longer frightens me, but what is that weird being across the marsh—what manner of man is he? Tomorrow I must cross the island and see that man for myself.

Yes, tomorrow. . . .

SEVENTH DAY. I AM LOST IN AN ENDLESS MAZE, and my brain is sore from trying to think my way out. A horrid fear is coming over me—I feel it plainly; a symptomatic weakness of the soul, a dread. I have seen and heard things today which shake my innermost being. This creature, Farquhar—in God's name—*what is he?*

This morning I awoke late in a bed drenched with sweat. The horrible dreams I cannot recall, save that my second night in Camelot was the most fearful of all my life. What will it be tomorrow night? Can I bear to live through the morrow?

I am getting out of hand. My thoughts wander, my pen scratches esoteric thoughts. I must collect myself and think this through. I must be coherent! . . .

I awoke after eleven o'clock and ate a hasty breakfast. I climbed to the tower and saw Farquhar in his coffin. I examined closely the wound in his arm. Of course! There was no blood, no inflammation! God in Heaven! Why had I never noticed this before? Farquhar's flesh is no ordinary flesh! It is a bloodless flesh, like moist and kneady clay.

Today his skeletal countenance was the same as yesterday. His eyelids appeared stiff, as in death, and his cheeks were sunken. I noticed, too, that his face was scratched and furrowed with long, jagged lines—like the slashing cuts of battle long healed over.

I worked a little with the generator, but I was shaking with impatience to commence my exploration. At one o'clock I slipped the Luger under my belt and stepped out of the front door.

The sky was cloudless, and the ocean smooth as glass. There were no sounds at all, and there was no breeze. The tower of the castle opposite stood up clearly in the sky; the fog had lifted from it, and I could see its crumbled stone in greater detail. And yet I could not dispel that transparency of mist that hovered before my vision.

I walked slowly down the decline that led to the edge of the forest. There was not an insect to be seen—not a bird—not an animal of any nature.

The ground was clay-like at first, but grew soggy as I proceeded. The trees grew denser, like living things that seemed to force me back with every step I took. Ferns grew enormous from the ground, fungi cluttered the scabrous bark of fallen trees, and the stench of swamp stagnation became heavier in my nostrils. Soon the sunlight was blackened out by the matted shrubbery above.

I climbed over and under uprooted trees; up, sometimes, into their very branches and down the other side. I hacked away thick shrubs, and trampled down branches and weeds that choked my legs. It seemed a work of hours, and the forest was so dense and solid that I could hear my echo resounding far ahead. I was scratched and bleeding in a dozen stinging wounds.

At one point I stopped long enough to examine my position. I had reached a clearing in the trees—a sort of grassy hillock—and stood upon it turning my gaze in all directions. The forest was black around me; black and hot and silent. I could see only the very top of Camelot behind me, and on the other side just the tower of the farther castle. I was just half-way there. I redoubled my efforts and pushed ahead.

It took me another hour or more before I felt myself climbing upward. Slowly and torturously at first, then easier as the foliage thinned, I drew closer to the castle. Finally I shook the marsh soil from my shoes and tramped up the grassy embankment.

A silence more awesome than before came upon me. That haze of illusion seemed more dominant. I stood shaking, staring upward.

How alike these dwellings were! As if they had been made at the same time from identical plans—and with the same stone blocks and wooden beams! A squat castle, compact almost to solidity, crowned by a single lofty tower, and bruised with the same water-yellowed fissures. I felt an unhealthy fear that these castles were too much alike!

I walked cautiously up the incline to the very door. It was half-way open, and the fear grew stronger in the pit of my stomach. I entered the hallway, and stood agape. These castles were the same. They had the same aged furniture, the same fireplace and mantel, the same tarnished candelabra. And the same dread silence!

I stood breathless, wondering what move to make next—to run from this place, or to seek out its host. I steadied my nerve. There was nothing yet to fear. I had met no obstacle, no sign of this man's presence.

Perhaps, I thought, he, too, sleeps during the hours of sunlight. Perhaps, like Farquhar, this archer also has a coffin for his bedroom high in the tower. With soundless steps I climbed the winding stairs.

I reached the upper floor, and was more and more amazed by its resemblance to Camelot. I found the door to the tower without difficulty and moved up quickly. The room above had the same brownstone circular walls, it had the same narrow slotted windows cut into them like firing-holes. On a stone bench rested an identical black coffin, and lying within it—

I stepped closer and bent over. I was staring into the face of William Farquhar!

When I had firmly convinced myself that this was no hallucination, when I had studied those tragic features, when I had seen the wound in that claylike arm—when these things happened, I tore back down the steps and fell crashing on the stone floor below.

I went directly, numbed, and shaken, to the room beside the balcony. I stood at the threshold for several seconds, then I felt surging laughter rising in my throat. This was my *own* room. This was the room which Farquhar had shown me on that first night in Camelot. This *was* Camelot!

When I had sobered from splitting laughter. I walked to the window and looked out. I stared down at the jungle of trees—that impenetrable jungle—and up at the castle beyond. It was the same, all the same. Somehow, in that maze of shrubbery, I had lost my bearings and come back to my exact starting-point. Perhaps some monstrous thing down there had driven me back! At the thought of it, at the thought of my anxiety as I had climbed the stairs, I broke out with increased laughter—and spent the remainder of the afternoon trying to shake the daze from my mind.

I said nothing of all this to Farquhar when he came down a little after six. I told him that a splitting headache had kept me from the generator, but that tomorrow I would be back to work. He took no offense, and appeared quite as cordial and considerate as always. I suppose it was this very cordiality which prompted me to do as I did, but I finally broke the bounds of my patience and asked him some direct questions.

"Who is that man across the marsh?" I asked. "And why do you and he wage battle every night? Why don't you bleed when an arrow strikes you? And why—in God's name—if you want to kill that man, don't you take a rifle and get it over with?"

I supposed it was Farquhar's turn to laugh, but he didn't. He only smiled—a hopeless and forgiving smile—and poured me a glass of wine and offered a cigarette.

"You would not understand," he said. "You would not understand any more than people understand why a Jew has been wandering the earth for over nineteen hundred years."

"Are you wandering the earth? And for how long?"

Farquhar sighed deeply and pointed at a plaque that hung over the mantel.

"Those arms," he said, "depict the forgotten herald of Sir Guillaume de Farquhar, once knight-envoy to Richard, whom we call the Lion-Hearted. Centuries ago those same arms were carried across Moslem sands to the very gates of Jerusalem, where they marked the presence of Guillaume de Farquhar—a man whose hatred of the Saracens wrought terrible fear throughout the land, a man who, in three days' battle, killed three score of the enemy with his own hands.

"To inform you of what occurred on that fateful day will be to break a silence five centuries old. But what matter? What man would believe?

"Sir Guillaume de Farquhar, however respected in the eyes of his Prince, was a boastful and cruel man. He went, not like others in the Crusades, for the love of the Cross, but for the glory of battle and war. He would slash his way through ranks of Saracens like a double-bladed plow; hacking and hewing his way to the blood-spattered walls of the city, there only to be repulsed by outnumbering enemies.

"He made many captives, and had immense loot of jeweled daggers and precious stones—spoils of war for which he would sacrifice no end of human lives. It was Farquhar's habit to go out alone across the nearby sand dunes to seek his quarry—single or multiple it mattered not—so that his thirst for blood might be sated. Vain! Cruel!

"That one day—that one day for ever set aside! See how it shakes my breath to say these things! See how I pale to the very eyes at the vision of it! It was on the Sabbath, and the Holy Armies knelt in prayer; knights, emperors, and yeomen alike. The defending wall at a short distance was bristling with spears, the sun gleamed like molten gold upon the helmets of the heathens. A curious silence had fallen, undisturbed except by the groans of the wounded who lay like split logs half smothered in the sand. It was on this day that Guillaume de Farquhar set out alone.

"Why did he go? Or where? These questions are unanswered. He bore a great broadsword at his side, and in his hands—accursed man!—he carried his longbow, notched with a cloth-yard arrow.

"He walked toward the sun over small hillocks of sand, his keen eyes alert for a hapless foe. Ah! There, not a hundred yards' distance, he saw three of them ministering to the dying. They were garbed in the robes of black priesthood, and from their lips droned the deistical rites of heathen sorcery.

"What folly raced through Farquhar's mind! Scarcely had he seen these exorcists when he let fly an arrow to pierce one through the throat. Scarcely had these other two known their fate, when a second arrow

laid one dead. The third, whose ornamental hood marked him as the superior monk, fell forward on his face and cried aloud for mercy.

"Farquhar's arrow twitched in his fingers. An impulse goaded him to slay this one on the spot, and yet the gloat of victory stayed his hand. He strove forward, and kicked the whining heathen in his head, and laughed aloud at his cowering protestations.

"The captive—such an aged and patriarchal man! His face was a yellowed parchment traced with lines of age-long sacrifice. He was clean-shaven both upon the face and head, and a blackened wound upon his forehead gave evidence of his initiation into the Black Priory of his clan. He was small and thin, but his skull was enormous in proportion. His eyes were faded gray—nay! almost white with age, and he was toothless and black-lipped. He carried no weapons save the wooden staff that lay by his feet, and there were no jewels or amulets upon him except for the curious metal ring which encircled one scrawny finger.

The ring widened Farquhar's eyes when he saw it, for it was unusually thick and wide, and occupied nearly a third of the man's finger. On top was a polished red stone that seemed to shine out rays of light. On the sides were carved writings, doubtless religious scriptures of some eastern icon. But it was the jeweled light of the red stone which caught Farquhar's glance. He bent down to rip it from the captive's finger.

"The man shrieked damnation, and jerked his hand away. He squirmed and twisted at Farquhar's feet. A fury seemed to rise in him, unheeding and cautionless. He pushed Farquhar away as he scrambled upright.

"So suddenly had he risen that the Christian was taken aback by sheer astonishment, and the Moslem broke away and ran toward the walls of the city.

"How foolhardy of him! Farquhar waited until he had covered a hundred feet, then he raised his bow and fired an arrow through the man's back. He drew out his broadsword and walked slowly to his side.

"The shaft had pierced the Moslem's lungs and pinned them together like a rivet. His back and spine were twisted as he fell, and a thin runnel of blood drained from his chest and stained the sand beside him. He lay there thrashing his arms and kicking his feet. He bent up to arch his back, then fell down again, and his chest rose and fell to the accompaniment of the moans which came almost breathless from his sand-choked throat.

"Farquhar grimaced at the sight of him, but kept his gaze fixed gloatingly upon the graven ring. A tide of anger had engulfed his mind at

the Moslem's daring rebuke to his power, and he resolved to let him die in the fullest agony of his wound, and to strip him of the talismanic ring only when his fading intellect alone could protest.

"The dying Saracen turned his eyes to Farquhar. His lips opened and closed; hushed words of pity came out. He begged—nay! he implored and pleaded that Farquhar send a second arrow into his heart to end his torture. But the Christian stood resolute; this man must run his course.

"Vain! Cruel! Blasphemous! God curse the day this was done before his city! And God forgive the day! The Moslem's outstretched hands touched Farquhar's feet. He raised himself to his elbows so that his whispered voice might reach his conqueror's ears. His body trembled as he moved, but he had not the strength, and he fell face-downward again, driving the arrow still deeper through the lungs.

"He twisted and groaned. His voice was cracked with driving pain as he begged for Farquhar's mercy. An arrow through my heart!" he moaned. *'An arrow through my heart!'* But Farquhar stood resolute.

"The dying man's eyes bulged out until Farquhar thought they would fly from his skull. There was blood and sand sticking to his lips as he twisted them into words of imploration. But Farquhar shook his head and leaned on the hilt of his sword, because it might be a long while before this man died. . . .

"Slowly, slowly death came upon the Moslem. He turned the shade of the plague-stricken, and shook from alternate fever and chills. He coughed from his bleeding lungs.

"Slowly, slowly he sank toward death, and with a last desperate energy he drew his hands together and twisted the ring upon his finger.

"What was this? What strange words did he mutter? Why did his dying eyes brighten with lurid fires even as a darkened cloud crossed the sun? He stared up past Farquhar's head—up to something far away. His voice rose higher with the shrill frenzy of some incantation, his fingers twisted and turned at the ring upon his finger.

"What ring was it? From whom? I know not. Perhaps it was the lost ring of Solomon. Perhaps it was the very ring with which that ancient king of Palestine conjured his familiar djinn and afrits. The strange tales told of Solomon are not too strange indeed for what occurred on those Moslem sands before Jerusalem. For djinn and afrits were many!

"The Saracen then spoke words to Farquhar aloud in French, of which he understood. His eyes were burning faggots in his skull, a new and

terrible energy went through his frame, and he uttered these words of sovereign power:

"Thou shalt never again into the burning sun turn thy gaze. Thou shalt never again eat food nor drink, nor shalt thou lie with women. Never again, throughout eternity, shalt thou ever know solemn peace and contentment until an arrow from thine own bow and arm shall pierce through the living heart of the greatest archer of all the land—an archer nameless to you for evermore!"

"The malediction fell from the Moslem's lips like drops of venom from a viper's fangs, and each dripping word scorched into Farquhar's brain. He stood stark, unable to command either his senses or his muscles.

"The Saracen's last word was still on his lips when a wind swept over the two men and blew a dust of sand through the air. The wind grew stronger, seeming to come from nowhere save directly overhead. It whirled around and around in slow circles, and grew faster with each second until it picked the sand up with it like a monstrous vacuum.

"Inside of this cone of sand and wind lay the Moslem, all but his eyes stricken dead; and outside stood Farquhar, agape and trembling from a chill he did not comprehend. The sword had fallen from his hand and he had covered his eyes from the rays of the sun.

"The whirlwind of sand grew faster, a geyser erupting from the earth. Crashes of thunder sounded from above, and inside there was a shrill whispering that was neither animal or human. A fiercely cold wind swept across the desert and kicked the sand before it as if it bore a tortured soul of its own. The sky was blackened from view.

"Farquhar fell to his knees before the gale, his eyes still blinded by the filtered sunlight that fell upon him. He could no longer see the Moslem, but his ears were ringing with the unearthly noises that came from within the cone. Then a red light dazzled—a penetrating red light that shone through his lowered eyelids. It came like an explosion from behind the wall of driving sand; the air was turned red by it, the very sand itself brightened like crimson beads. For a whole minute the light flashed like a burning pyre, and then it was suddenly extinguished, and the frenzied whispering died into silence.

"How long Farquhar knelt with shaded eyes, he never knew. At the least it was many hours, for when he was first able to draw his hands away he saw that the sun had already set. The horizon about him was drawing closer and closer, and long purple shadows were sketched across the land.

"He saw immediately that he was alone. The Moslem had vanished,

and only his crusted blood on the sand gave evidence of where he had lain. The wind had vanished too, and the air was calm and unnaturally silent.

"Farquhar rubbed his aching eyes. He looked searchingly in all directions, but the Moslem was nowhere to be seen. A hundred feet away were the stiffened bodies of the two slain priests and the bodies of fallen warriors. Still farther was the solid black mass of the city and the lights of torches.

"The sand at Farquhar's feet was ruffled by the imprint of his boots, and his naked sword lay as it had fallen from his hands. Nearby the Moslem's blood had hardened like a horrible escutcheon painted on the sand. The whirlwind had touched none of these things; it had come and gone and left no trace, except for the disappearance of the priest!

"But was it a whirlwind?"

"It had come suddenly from directly overhead and swept down on the Moslem like a huge bird. It had engulfed him, and its shrill voice had cursed or blessed him, and it had blazed like an inferno just before it vanished, and it had carried the priest off with it.

"Farquhar's ears were still ringing with the words of the dying Moslem. A heavy dread was on his mind, a compelling horror and desperation that shackled him to the sand at his feet. He turned slowly and headed toward the Christian camp, but each step he took was sweating drudgery. And every step he's taken since has been the same.

"From that very hour the curse of the Moslem began to work. His words had shaken Farquhar to his soul; a malignancy of spirit had invaded him and drove him relentlessly onward. On that very night he tried to die on his own sword, but his strength deserted him. He has tried since then, and he knows now that the words of the Moslem must be carried out to the letter.

"Late on that same night he wandered into his own tent, past his own sentries, who drew back aghast at his appearance. He tried to eat, but the food choked in his throat. He tried to sleep, but he tossed the whole night through, and the next morning he was blind.

"All day he was blind, and only at night did his brain find relaxation. But he could not sleep with other men, and that compelling force within his soul led him to the Christian burial ground. Each day he went there and slept in hallowed earth.

"Men loathed and feared him. Richard himself drew back with a feeling of awe and crossed himself, then pointed his sword at Farquhar in a ges-

ture of banishment. He was driven from the camp, and the name of Farquhar was forbidden mention on the lips of men.

"Thuswise Guillaume de Farquhar commenced to endure the curse of the greatest archer, and he slew not only Seljuk Turks, but Englishmen and Frenchmen alike. The toll of death mounted with each night, until when the months and years rolled by he became a legend of horror.

"He roamed only at night, and during the day he sought the dark shelters of subterranean vaults and tombs. He prayed until he was hoarse for the Moslem's forgiveness, and he cursed him with the vilest curses of his imagination — and then prayed again.

"Years followed years, and great changes came over Europe. The Crusades were ended, and new codes came into being, and new empires were formed on the crumbled ruins of the old. Firearms, swift and utter in their destruction, replaced the bow and arrow; but still this unhappy marksman wandered over Europe seeking the greatest archer. He killed countless more men, until the day came when there were no longer men with arrows, and the hopeless, tiring search seemed destined to endure through-out eternity.

"Perhaps the Moslem's gloating prescience grew kinder after many centuries, for Farquhar's steps were directed to a mystic isle in the sea. Upon this isle he found the archer who had eluded him through the centuries.

"Who is this archer? Is he a living, mortal man, or a demon sent by the Moslem's mockery! I do not know. Many are the nights that Farquhar has stood watching, hoping, praying. Many are the hours spent in trying to pierce the veil of mist that hovers between them. Is this other archer, like himself, accursed and set aside to battle throughout endless time? Did he, too, once meet a Moslem priest?

"The vigil of these men has never ended. They fight on and on, and only when the arrow of one has transfixed the heart of the other can the battle end. There is a weird, unexplainable kinship between them which unites their souls as one. They appear to meet each other during the sleeping hours in their coffins, like two phantoms in a rendezvous with death; for once these men met a common horror, and must share a common fate. They will never know each other, and their curiosity will never cease, until one arrow — from whom it does not matter — has reached its destined mark."

It is after midnight, and I am sitting in my room with these pages out before me. The story of the Moslem priest has been unfolded in my

diary as if Farquhar himself wrote it there. Each word I can remember, and each word is here inscribed to testify to the soul-shaking things which happen. And even as I write I can feel that awful presence—a prescient evil that lurks within my room. Somehow, shaking as I write, I can sense the Moslem's watching eyes.

My hands are trembling, and I do not feel that I can write much longer. Even now I can hear Farquhar on the balcony outside as he slings his arrows across the island. And I can hear the other arrows as *he* shoots them back from across the way. These men have redoubled their efforts tonight; the air is singing with the twang of bow-strings.

I questioned Farquhar on many points tonight, but he will not commit himself. I questioned him of the history of Camelot Castle, and of this island, and of the man across the way. But he claims no knowledge of these things.

"Why am I here?" I asked him. "Why did you leave the island to buy an electric generator?"

It is better, he told me, to use powerful modern searchlights than mere lanterns in hunting down his foe. With lights glaring on the castle his aim would be truer, the flight of his arrows more certain.

And if he killed the other man, what then? But he did not know. Who—*who* is the other man? He did not know. Nor did he profess any desire to know.

But I shall know! Moslem or no Moslem! Be he madman, saint, or demon, tomorrow I shall know!

EIGHTH DAY. IT IS ENDED, and I write these words from the light of a campfire on the beach. I dare not go back to Camelot; it is alone up there, alone and black and silent. The waves lap at the sand by my feet, the breeze of the sea is refreshing and soporific. I wait only for the lights of the *Celtic*.

To go back? To go back, in memory, to those hours? The very memory shakes me with a deathly fever. I would tear it from my brain if I knew how. I no longer ask myself who Farquhar is. But it is that Moslem—who—*what* is he? How can he do these things? What horror has he mastered?

I have been to that other castle—*or have I?* I have seen, close by, that shadowed archer on the balcony—*or have I?* I have crossed the tangled marsh and climbed the tower steps, I have dragged that archer from his lair, I have brought him to the very face of William Farquhar—*or have I?*

Oh merciful God, what things I have done this day!

I must go back to my awakening, that late hour of morning when I wrestled myself away from my dream and looked again at the sky and sea, so vast about me. I stared long and eagerly at the castle across the island, and it stood like a challenging thing, mocking me to approach it. The jungle below was lifeless and silent. There were no clouds in the sky and the air was clear. The air was so clear that I seemed to see these things in greater detail. The castle was like the very reflection of Camelot. I saw the same window beside the balcony in which I myself was standing.

I seemed to see a face there peering back at me with the same silent mockery. And I felt the premonitory horror of what was yet to come.

I ran swiftly down the stairs and stopped at the open door. From here I could see only the tower of the castle, for the gnarled trees grew like a wall before me. I stood hesitating, my muscles twitching with impatience.

Was it the fear of the priest which stopped me? Or did I fear that I would lose myself in the jungle again as I did yesterday? I wanted to run screaming from the sight of it, yet a grim determination to reach that dwelling throbbed like a pulse in my conscience.

I went back to my room and got my pistol and a hatchet; then I forced myself to walk down the grassy slope to the edge of the forest. I went slowly, measuring my position from the door of Camelot. I kept my eyes reverting to the tower of the farther castle until the trees blinded it from view. And then it grew suddenly dark.

I hacked my way through in cold fury. I chopped a path and trampled down the debris that cluttered it. Straight as an arrow flies, I proceeded, straight to the dwelling beyond.

I seemed to catch glimpses of the same logs I had encountered yesterday. There was the same stinking bog, the same vines and gnarled creepers. And it took me the same weary hours to push my way through.

As I neared the center of the jungle I heard my echo again, resounding far ahead of me. It grew louder as I proceeded, until it seemed to be pounding not twenty feet ahead of me. But it was so dark that I could scarcely see my hand before my face. I went on blindly, slashing and cutting like a man gone mad. Then I stopped and stared ahead.

There was a clearing in the trees, for a ray of sunlight poured down from above. It was the same clearing which I had found yesterday, a grassy hillock in the earth. I strove forward and walked swiftly to its summit. It stood there like a jewel set in the very center of the island.

The very center! How uncannily I sensed it! There was nothing but trees on every side, and the cloudless patch of sky above.

I dared not to linger long, for I must reach the castle and return before sundown. I looked behind me and examined my position. Surely I could not miss my objective if I went straight ahead!

I took three steps from the edge of the knoll, then whirled around. It was dark again, and I could see no light save the filtered sunlight from above. But distinctly I had heard it; the sound of my footsteps in the underbrush behind me!

The echo again, I told myself, but I pushed my way ahead as if the Moslem himself were at my heels. For another hour I slashed through the forest. I seemed to climb the same trees which I had climbed just a moment before. I smelled the same swollen fungi. Once my outstretched hands touched an arrow stuck in a tree. I jerked it out and peered closely. It was old and rusty-headed, and was aimed in the direction in which I moved.

I grew more amazed as I proceeded. A sort of path was hacked through this side of the forest—a crude trail that someone had recently cut through. It was easier to move; yet I moved with caution. Who had carved this trail? Who?—and when?

At last I reached the opening of the marsh. I ran ahead breathlessly, across a soft bog and up the embankment of the castle. The sunlight streamed into my eyes, and for a moment I was blinded. But as my eyes narrowed for this light, I could see the place standing like a solid wall before me.

The door of the castle was hanging open, like the mouth of some animal compelling me to enter. It was in dread silence. The tower rose incumbently above my head. Every nook and cranny seemed the same as in Camelot—the narrow windows, the creaking gibbet chains hanging from its walls.

I went swiftly up the steps and moved inside. My eyes were blurred by what I saw. I ran up the stairway to the room beside the balcony. I stopped in sheer horror; for this was my room—and this was Camelot.

Once again, before nightfall, I followed that eerie trail back through the marshland. As I neared the center I heard that echo sounding before me—as of someone drawing nearer—someone not quite myself. When I reached the grassy hillock the sounds ceased, and when I went down the other side, they came again from behind me, growing softer.

I ran swiftly through the trees over a trail well trampled down. Breath-

lessly I reached the clearing, and then I stood sickened by what I saw: Camelot, shadowed in the dusk before me.

I raced through the door and to my room. I climbed the tower and saw Farquhar silent in his coffin. I came down again and dropped sobbing on my bed. It was almost six o'clock before I felt the strength to arouse myself. I lighted a lantern and carried it to the window.

The darkness had descended swiftly, so that the castle was scarcely visible. I could see the tower and the balcony. A yellow fog hung over them, like a phantom seeking to hide them from my view. A fog like a dust storm—a whirlwind of mist and sand. But distinctly I saw a lighted lantern shining from the window beside the balcony.

Farquhar came down a few minutes later, none the more refreshed for his long sleep. He greeted me, then went directly to the balcony. He stared long and intently at the castle until he saw the black figure appear on the balcony; then he notched an arrow and drew it to his shoulder.

I stood at the balcony door, unnoticed and unminded. With aching dread I saw him fire the arrow into the darkness, and saw the other archer fire one back at the same instant. How long I stood watching these reflected marksmen, I cannot recall, but it seemed like many hours. Finally my horror overcame me, and I cried out in anguish. I ran to his side and grabbed his arm.

"In the name of God," I cried, "*do you know whom you are fighting?*"

Scarcely had the shaft shot from his bow, when he turned to me. In a voice as low as a whisper, he said, "I shall never know."

And then it happened.

The last word was still on his lips when he jerked upright. I saw the sudden wincing of the muscles in his face; then I saw his chest. It was pierced through and through by an arrow—directly into and through his heart, so that its head was sticking through his back.

Farquhar raised himself to his toes, one hand grasped the arrow where it entered his chest. I saw the light of fire in his eyes, and heard strange foreign words fall from his dark lips. I heard words which were meant for no ears on earth; then I saw Farquhar shake and crash face-downward on the floor.

He had fallen on top of his bow, which cracked beneath him. The bloodless tip of the arrow stuck upright from his spine—up more than fifteen inches where it had been pounded through him when he fell!

I stood above him, cold with dread. Even as I watched, his body

seemed to shrink. That long body of sleek muscle fell away swiftly, and the cloak drooped over him as if it hung upon only the branches of his former being. A sort of dust rose from beneath it, evil-smelling and ancient, like the dust of fallen pylons. A sedimental clay was on the floor.

I left the castle as fast as my legs would carry me, and for two hours I pounded my way back through the jungle. Exhausted and numbed I reached the far side and saw the jagged mass of the castle rising before me. There was a lantern shining from the window beside the balcony, but there were no sounds. I raced swiftly to the open door and up the steps. At the balcony door I stopped.

I saw a sheaf of arrows, and a black-caped figure lying on the floor. From beneath the figure I saw the shattered ends of a longbow, held together by only a string. I ran forward and jerked away the cape.

A rotting skeleton was lying there, with an arrow stuck between its ribs.

LAST DAY (AT SEA) I am in stateroom A-3, the room which Farquhar occupied on the voyage to Durance Island. It is cold in here, and I have but to move a finger to feel his presence here about me. It is well into the night, it is dreamy, and music drifts from the rooms below, and I can hear people on the promenade laughing lightly among themselves.

And I can hear other sounds—the churning of the propellers as they push the *Celtic* farther and farther away. But how far can the mightiest propellers push me from this island?

I must sit here and write the last words.

Yes, I have buried William Farquhar. How or why? With whose strength of body and soul, I cannot say. Surely not my own! I buried him in the grassy hillock in the center of the island, with an arrow for his tombstone.

On that night I wandered back and forth along my path like an automaton drawn and driven by unseen forces. From Camelot I carried Farquhar's bones to the hillock and laid them down. I then went—how unutterably mad!—back through the jungle to the other castle, and found only his cape and broken bow . . . and that dust which waited on the floor. His bones were gone—gone as I had taken them but an hour before.

From Camelot to Camelot I traveled that night, and from balcony to balcony searching for the bones of the other. But there were only

Farquhar's bones, which I had laid on the knoll. There was only Camelot Castle, which I went running out of—only to run back into it.

The night is growing younger, and the dawn of tomorrow breaks on the horizon. Tomorrow we shall be far from this place, and soon I shall be home again—home in that little room where Farquhar first came to me less than two weeks ago.

But can I ever cease to wonder? Can I ever cease to take my soul back to Durance Island, and let it dwell in futility between those ancient places? Shall I ever be able to forget just one word of the Moslem priest? I think not; I think the archer's words will haunt me all the days of my life. Over and over I have pondered on these things; I have weighed one castle against the other, one archer against his foe. My task is a hopeless one, and I had best look back upon this voyage with clouded eyes.

For I can never cease but wonder why there are not two graves, instead of one, to mark the final resting-place of William Farquhar.



decoration by Boyce

The Sight Of Roses

by Jay Tyler

(author of And Then No More)

THE VISITOR LOOKED AROUND THE ROOM, then his eyes returned to the armchair, within the pentade on the bare floor, where Lester Morrow was seated and his chuckle seemed to blend with the silence. "You didn't really think it would work, did you?"

Morrow opened his mouth and finally managed say, "No."

"You are right in a sense. It didn't, you know; and then, in another way it did." The Visitor paused, then chuckled again. "I . . . or perhaps I ought to say 'we' . . . are not known as the Father of Lies for nothing. . . . But I really ought to add something which even you human beings are aware of—at least some of you. A lie is not necessarily a false statement, you know."

A man who went into psychosomatic asthma at the sight
of roses couldn't possible tamper with roses, could he?

Lester Morrow blinked rapidly and shook his head.

"And now," the other continued, "you are wondering if I am really here. I am. But to pursue my statement: The essence of the lie is deception; and there are some of you humans who realize that deception can be most effective when no positively false statements are involved. True statements are simply made in such manner—generally a matter of omissions—that the hearer deceives himself by coming to unwarranted conclusions . . . I doubt if I could avoid deceiving you no matter how much I wanted to avoid it. No matter."

Morrow found his voice at last. "What did you mean by saying that it didn't work in a sense and did work in another sense?"

"Oh . . . that? Very simple. It didn't work in the sense that had it not seemed convenient to me to visit you this way—after all, such appearance are so seldom necessary for my purposes these days—I simply would have ignored your amusing procedures."

"What are you, really? Am I looking at an illusion?"

The Visitor nodded. "You are. But do not make the tiresome error of confusing the words 'illusion' and 'hallucination'. I am not a projection of your nervous system; I have actual existence independent of you, and I am actually here in this room." The Visitor turned toward the sofa. "And if you do not mind, I shall make myself comfortable." He seated himself, remaining outside the pentade. "I appear to you as a somewhat well dressed and distinguished-looking gentleman of your own species. That is illusion, a false or misleading appearance. It is the most convenient way for me to pass time on this plane."

"Then all this business about horns and hoofs and a spiked tail, and brimstone and sulphur . . . ?"

The Visitor smiled. "Partly instances of hallucination; but some of my predecessors and colleagues past have had their own individual ways of combining business and amusement . . . Besides, we have always found it convenient to do the expected, up to a point."

"What— who are you, really?"

"A member of an intelligent species of beings which live in the same universe with you, but on a separate plane of existence. Perhaps the word 'dimension' would give you a better idea, inadequate as it is."

"Then—" Lester Morrow licked his lips—"you are not The Adversary, after all."

"Oh, but we are! I am. We positively do not like you human beings; not at all. You have potentialities which fill us with dismay—among them the potentiality of crossing over to our particular plane and invading

us. We have been waging a preventive war with you for millennia, though not for the express purpose of annihilating you—we learned that this was impossible—but to keep you in your place. For that reason we have always been willing to co-operate with what you might term the evil desires of human beings when so doing would have long-range results to our advantage."

"Then," said Morrow, "my soul is in no danger in making a deal with you . . . Except—what sort of deal could I make? What do I have that you want?" He looked at The Visitor carefully. "You have just indicated that you would not have come if it were not to your advantage. But what can I give you?"

The Visitor laughed outright. " 'Give me your sins,' as the Vision said to St. Francis . . . No, your soul is in no danger from *me*. What you do to yourself is another matter. But the fact that you tried to get in touch with me, even though you had small belief it could actually happen, makes you of certain value to me, under the circumstances. . . . So, I will help you."

"You mean you will . . ."

"Yes, Lester Morrow. I will help you attain those desires that are so important to you." The Visitor lifted his hand and ticked off fingers. "You want to get rid of your wife. You want to be rid of her in a way which will not bring the retaliation of the law and society down on you, but rather—I believe the word is frame your partner, who is her lover. You want to enter into a second alliance with another woman. You want to prosper in your business—a rather difficult matter, considering that your soon-to-be-deceased partner is really the brains of your operation . . . A rather interesting problem."

"Can you do it?"

The Visitor shook his head. "I am not a magician." He raised his hand quickly. "But I can work out the solution, and tell *you* what steps to take. What you do about my advice is up to you; but I can guarantee success."

"And . . . the price? I'm not foolish enough to believe you would help me for nothing."

"Oh, you'll pay the price, I assure you. That will not be my doing; in fact, I will even try to help you avoid payment to a certain extent—postpone it, that is."

"But—why?"

"For services rendered, as it were. Your partner is a very brilliant man. He does not realize it, but he is on the verge of a discovery—a

major breakthrough—which we view with very great alarm, to use one of your politicians' phrases. We would have had to do something about this, anyway; and I must say I appreciate the vastly simpler solution that your desires have made possible. By making a concentrated effort to contact who you imagined I was, you opened yourself to direct communication with me; this, I assure you, is so much better than the indirect methods we generally have to use."

The Visitor rose. "We shall meet again, but I need not warn you to say nothing about this. I am attuned, on such visits so that you—and only you—can see and hear me."

"And . . . you promise me success?"

"You will have three successes. Part of the price, something over which I have no direct control, however, will be three failures. I am not omniscient, but I have enough of what you call clairvoyance to tell you this . . . And now I bid you good night. Just one thing: Remove that silly design, please, and don't bother with these ridiculous tomes. While they have, in a sense, served our mutual purposes, they are of no further value to you."

Morrow started to get up out of the chair. "Wait! What am I supposed to do now?"

The Visitor smiled. "It will come to you," he said. "At the proper time, it will come to you."

A moment later, the room was empty save for Lester Morrow. There was no indication that another party had been present at all.

II

THREE NIGHTS LATER, Lester Morrow decided that it *had* been a hallucination. It was clearly his subconscious at work, even though The Plan had come to him. This morning he had awakened with the sense of having dreamed at length, although he could not recall a single detail. But the plan was there in his mind, and it all fell into place as the day went along. When he retired to his private study, he was ready to start.

There was no sound in the room but a voice whispering, "Sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep and listen . . . listen . . . listen. Sleep and listen . . . listen . . . listen . . . you will obey . . . you will obey" The voice was Lester Morrow's own voice, and it came from the speaker of a tape recorder on the floor beside the overstuffed chair in which Morrow sat.

There was no light in the room but a single turtle-neck lamp which illuminated a slowly-rotating disk on the desk. Black and white spirals, which seemed to wind into infinite distance, were all that Morrow could see, as the whispered voice to one side continued.

Morrow slept, and listened, and whisper continued. "You will see no roses . . . you will not recognize any flower as a rose . . . you will not recognize any flower as a rose . . . you will see no roses . . ." The whisper paused, then repeated, "Even if someone says, 'This is a rose', you will recognize no roses . . . you will see no roses . . ." The whisper continued, over and over, repeating and expanding the command. "You will recognize no flower as a rose until you learn your wife is dead."

Presently, the whispering voice ceased; there was silence for a moment, then a bell-tone sounded from the speaker. Morrow awoke, feeling drugged, and got out of the chair slowly. All he wanted to do was to crawl into bed, but there was something he had to do first. He opened the drawer of the desk, and picked up a slip of paper. There was a list of precise instructions in his own handwriting. Morrow groaned—but there was no avoiding it; he had to perform each and every operation specified on this sheet of paper before retiring. Wearily he set about disassembling the hypnotic device and reversing the tape on the recorder, erasing its contents . . .

He had not planned a second killing, but the moment Lester Morrow saw Irma Starzl, the following evening, he knew she had to die—tonight. He heard the click of heels outside the door, and stiffened. Then the door opened, and there she was, her blonde hair tumbling about her heart-shaped face, her bosom heaving slightly against the tight print blouse. He knew that she wore no brassiere in this weather, and, as usual, found himself wondering if the buttons on her blouse wouldn't pop.

"Why . . . Mr. Morrow!" she exclaimed.

Morrow closed the drawer of the desk and straightened up, forcing a smile. "Hello, Irma," he said casually. "You've caught a burglar, I'm afraid, gloves and all."

"Why . . . Mr. Morrow." The relieved, half-amused tone added unspoken words. *Why, Mr. Morrow—you could never do anything like that! You poor, gentle dear—you couldn't even pass a red light, let alone commit any kind of crime!*

He smiled at her. "But it's true, Irma. See—I've sneaked into my partner's office late at night and you caught me rummaging through

Mr. Hamilton's desk. I'm ready to confess—I was looking for the bottle he keeps here, only I hadn't found it. Do you know where it is?" (Of course she knew.) "I thought a little highball might be in order."

She smiled back, and her smile was provocative. "It isn't in the desk, Mr. Morrow. He keeps it in the file cabinet." She added sultrily, "You were reading his papers."

His eyes followed her as she crossed the office to the cabinet and bent over, and he felt a tinge of regret. But . . . she didn't have to die immediately. There would be time . . .

"I'll have to confess that is true, too—although that was not my intention." (Hardly, when the paper she had seen in his hand was one he was planting in Peter Hamilton's desk!) "And, you know," he added in what he hoped was his customary naive manner, "I discovered the most astonishing thing . . . But a nice girl like you wouldn't want to know . . ."

She straightened up with the bottle in her hand, a look of consternation on her face. "Mr. Hamilton . . . hasn't been stealing . . ."

So he has been stealing, Morrow thought. "Oh, no," he said. "Or if he has, he's concealed it very cleverly, so that I didn't suspect. I'm rather clever, myself, Miss Starzl. I don't think he could fool me about such things."

"Of course not," she agreed indulgently. "Would you like me to get a glass and some mixer from the refrigerator?" She saw his eyes running over her, and glanced down at the flower pinned to her blouse, and gasped. "Oh—Mr. Morrow I'm sorry . . . I didn't realize . . ."

"Didn't realize what?" he asked, looking at the flower, wondering if this were some botanical creation.

She stared at him. "Why—how wonderful! You're cured!"

"Cured? . . . Have I been sick, Irma. I—I have a feeling that there's something I don't remember."

"But it's truly wonderful," she said. "This rose—why you always used to have such dreadful attacks when you saw a rose . . . Then it was all psychological, wasn't it? You didn't have an allergy after all."

Morrow sighed. "I guess not. Maybe that is part of the cure; I don't really remember being bothered by any kind of flowers. Strange, isn't it. I remember now. I came here from the doctor's. I felt so good when I left him that I just had to come here to celebrate—and the cure was so good I've forgotten what was wrong with me."

He sat down in Hamilton's chair and stretched lazily. "You know, that must be why I was looking for the bottle. To celebrate, of course.

How I've changed—why you never saw me take a drink in the office before, did you? Well, that's because I never did. Never did at all," he repeated. "And maybe some other things have changed, too." He smiled at her. "Won't you join me in the celebration?"

"I shouldn't," she said slowly, but her eyes gave their own answer. "I really shouldn't be here either, but—well, since you've changed so, Mr. Morrow . . . I came here to meet someone downstairs. But someone didn't meet me, so I came up to the office to telephone . . . I'll get the mixer."

The smile left his face as she went into the other office, and he heard her heels clicking across the floor. Why did she have to notice? Perhaps if she hadn't, it would not be necessary after all, but now . . .

"What terrible things has Mr. Hamilton been up to?" she asked lightly as she came back with glasses and mixer, and started to prepare the drinks.

"You disillusion me," he said sadly, then smiled. "But it's really too good to keep. I know you'll be discreet." He opened the desk drawer and took out the paper he'd just put there. "Peter has been playing with fire and it looks as if he's going to get burned."

Irma took the paper and read aloud, "*. . . can't toss me aside like an old shoe, darling. You belong to me now, and you're going to get a divorce and marry me like you promised, or . . .*" her voice faded as her eyes fell on in intimate reminiscences mingled with threats.. She blushed very prettily, Morrow thought.

Irma looked up. "Is this all there is?"

He nodded. "That is all I found. While I'm confessing my crimes, I may as well add that I was diverted from my original burglarious intentions, and was trying to find the opening and continuation of this letter when you caught me. Thought there might be some indication of identity." There was no need to add the the handwriting was that of Mrs. Lester Morrow and that he had discovered this part of a letter which Arlene had written.

"It's shocking," Irma said, looking anything but shocked.

"Yes, isn't it?" he agreed, as they touched glasses. "I've known all along that Peter was a bit of a Don Juan, but I never thought he'd get himself in such a tangle." Morrow sighed. "Which reminds me, my dear, that we must use a bit of discretion ourselves. You know what people would think if the charwoman or anyone else discovered us like this. Shall we retire to the roof?"

She blinked at him. "Why, Mr. Morrow . . ." She might as well have asked outright, "What could you know about the roof?"

"It's a nice quiet place to talk, and have a few quiet drinks," he said. "We ought to be able to see the water from here, and a cool breeze on a night like this is much better than air conditioning. Let's take our equipment. Here's a bag to put it in."

As they locked up the office, he glanced at the legend, *M-H Pharmaceuticals* on the floor and thought, *Not for long . . .*

The trick was to find the right spot accidentally. Morrow led Irma along, then stopped suddenly and pointed. "Why, look at that," he said softly, in a wondering tone.

"Someone else?" she whispered.

"Silly, of course not. Who could come here? Only—it looks as if someone has been here, at that. They've left a pile of cushions. I see no reason why we shouldn't take advantage of their thoughtfulness, do you?"

He took off his gloves, put them in his pocket, and steered her toward the spot he knew only too well, having often been a silent witness to various fascinating activities up here late at night. *Another drink*, he thought, *and she'll be ready to nestle.*

He was right. Another drink to celebrate Morrow's "cure", and Irma's curiosity about what other inhibitions might have vanished along with his psychosomatic asthma swept aside the few she herself had—if she had any. She managed only a soft, "Oh . . . Mr. Morrow," when his arm slipped around her, and no objection at all when he undid her blouse. He was right about the absence of a brassiere, and her hands became as busy as his . . .

Morrow had often thought about the sadness with is said to follow joy, but his sadness was of a different kind. His regret was for what he must do now as he helped Irma to her feet. "Look at the lights on the river," he murmured softly.

Now—while she turned! A rabbit punch to the back of that lovely neck. He could not suppress a sob. He caught her as she fell back. Now—over the side! He shrank from looking, but could not resist. He could not hear the sickening thud, yet he would always hear it he thought . . .

No one had seen him enter the office building from the side door; he had met no one on the stairs. Now he made his way cautiously and quietly across to adjoining roofs; carrying the bag with the evidence. There was a moment when his heart almost stopped as he skirted around

a chimney, but the couple he had come upon were oblivious to his presence. He thrust aside the temptation to draw back into the shadows and watch; there was no time. He struck out silently in a different direction and came at last to a condemned apartment house. If anyone saw him coming down the fire escape, they would think nothing of it; he only had to worry about police cars.

There were none. He reached the pavement after a short jump, disposed of the bag efficiently, and made his way to a deserted subway entrance. From there it was a short trip to the parking lot.

As he drove homeward, he reviewed the events of the day. He had kept his appointment in Paterson that morning, phoned home to tell Arlene he wouldn't be back until late—and to make sure that she would be out that afternoon as usual. Hamilton had helped him unwittingly; the thought occurred to Morrow as he telephoned the florist shop where Peter always ordered the flowers he sent to Arlene. He established that an order had already been placed and would be delivered to Mrs. Morrow by two. Arlene would be out until late afternoon.

He had rented a car, driven up back roads to a spot about a quarter mile from the end of his property, driven off a side-road which led to a burned-out house, and cut through the woods on foot. Trees screened the property on either side; no one would see him approaching from the rear, entering by the cellar door. He had a twinge of apprehension as he came upstairs and made his way toward the porch. If the flowers had not arrived . . . if they had not been left inside the porch, on the table . . .

But he found them there. The next operation was relatively simple. Both Morrow and Hamilton, as partners in wholesale pharmaceuticals could obtain small amounts of *Strychnos toxifera*, ample for his purpose. He donned rubber gloves and applied the deadly substance to the thorns on flowers that he did not recognize for what they were. Poor Arlene—she could never pick up flowers that bore thorns without puncturing or scratching herself; once it had been a good-natured joke between them.

There remained only to put the flowers back into the box—arranging them so that the thorns were in the most advantageous position—and remove all traces of his presence, then depart the way he came.

He wondered, as he drove homeward now, whether Arlene's body had been discovered. There was a good chance of it; this was Thursday evening, and Mrs. Pratt, from down the road, usually dropped in on Thursdays. It didn't really matter, but it would help.

There was a police car outside the house, and another which he assumed was a doctor's. All went as planned. He walked in to be greeted by the police and to be informed that Arlene was dead.

A moment of stunned disbelief— not overdone, just right. Then he saw the roses on the table. *Roses!* It was no longer necessary to act; something had clicked in his brain the moment Lieutenant Dexter said gently, "Your wife is dead, Mrs. Morrow." Now the response to the sight of roses was automatic. He reeled, clutching a chair for support and for the first time in his life *appreciated* a violent attack of asthma.

But even as he choked and reeled, he thought: *Valerie— not too soon — but it won't be long now . . .*"

III

THE VISITOR SAID, "I see you have persuaded yourself that I do not really exist."

Lester Morrow, sitting in the same chair as before, but not surrounded by a pentacle, smiled. "No . . . I don't . . ."

The Visitor sighed. "I suppose I ought to be annoyed, but really, I couldn't care much less."

"And to think," Morrow went on, "that if I'd just waited, Peter Hamilton would have saved me the trouble of killing Arlene."

"You would still be waiting," The Visitor replied.

"I guess you weren't there at the trial, then. The Prosecution showed that he had even more motivation for killing Arlene than I had suspected and that he had intercepted a delivery of roses to her in the past. Obviously, he was rehearsing his murder. He had found a way of getting them to her without— he thought— arousing suspicion; but he was wrong. Once she was killed, people began to remember things they might not have remembered otherwise."

A chuckle came from the other figure in the room. "I wish—I do wish that there were more like you, Mr. Morrow. I wish that all humanity were like you, so that we would ignore you all in perfect safety."

"You're suggesting that Peter Hamilton would not have killed Arlene—that he could plan it but not bring himself to do it?"

"If he could have done so, Mr. Morrow, then you could have drawn pentagrams in this room, and chanted ditties, and burned incense, and even engaged in a so-called Black Mass, complete with all the silly ceremonies of Sodom that you were capable of—but you'd never have

met me. There are circumstances under which a man like Peter Hamilton would murder his mistress, and we saw to it that seemingly overwhelming evidence of motive was presented by the prosecution. But think a moment about that sheet from a letter you found and planted in his desk—did you ever find any more of it?"

"No—no, I didn't."

"The letter was not only never mailed; it was never finished. Arlene was constantly writing letters which she destroyed—or thought she did. It was the way she got rid of her hostile impulses against Hamilton. And she said things to friends, such wonderfully misleading things. But the fact, Mr. Morrow, is that Peter Hamilton did not kill her simply because he never had any reason to; she never actually threatened him at all." A deep sigh came from The Visitor. "Why he could not have been content with satisfying the desires of the flesh, I shall never understand. I admit it. I do not understand you humans at all. I do not understand how the restrictions of what he called 'honor' kept him from taking the Company away from you, when he saw nothing dishonorable about violating what you humans call a holy and honorable sacrament . . . If only you humans were like cats or monkeys, without the means to satisfy your curiosity, we could leave you to your own devices."

"I suppose," Morrow said, "you arranged for Hamilton to contract pneumonia and die before appeal could go through."

"You shuttle between belief and doubt; and when you believe that I am real, you fasten on to that reality all the absurd legends about me that you have heard. You think of me as some sort of supernatural torturer, and now and then inwardly you tremble at the fear of being in my power after what you call death . . . No; Peter Hamilton's untimely demise was our good fortune. It is true that we managed to arrange conditions which would make some sort of good fortune possible, but nonetheless we had expected a great deal of further work on his case. Taking it all in all, this entire affair has been handled at so small a cost to me that I almost feel benevolent toward you. Thus, I give you a warning." The Visitor started to fade, instead of vanishing suddenly as before.

"I do bear you a little good will, Mr. Morrow, so attend me if you can. Forego the third success. Two are now behind you; you are ahead of the game on your terms. Stop now and you will never see me again." He was gone before Morrow could ask any further questions.

IV

FOR A TIME, LESTER MORROW was disposed to follow The Visitor's advice, but the fact was that he was lonely. The newspapers had left him hardly any grounds for self respect that he could talk about; and Valerie was the only one who seemed to understand.

The third success came off when he and Valerie were married; it started to go sour in just about a month. The fact that Morrow's new partner was even more efficient than Peter Hamilton had been—and showed no interest in Valerie—was not much comfort.

And Morrow knew that he dared not push his luck by trying a second uxoricide.

The last stage started in the kitchen one evening when he was preparing another round of drinks. He looked up as Valerie came in, representing the see-through costume she wore for parties, as compared with the proper dress she affected when they were alone together, seldom as it was.

"My dear," he began mildly, "I really would appreciate your not making so much of Johnny Meek cleverness before everyone." He couldn't bring himself to object to anything further.

"Why not," she taunted, "there's no one else clever around here."

She flounced out, and he followed after a few minutes to hear her in the middle of the latest anecdote about Johnny, who was sitting insultingly close to her on the sofa. Johnny had manipulated a deal which brought him better than ten thousand non-taxable dollars.

"Well, they say the meek shall inherit the earth", Myron Keller spoke up.

Valerie snuggled against him. "I'm real earthy," she drawled.

Myron whistled. "The more I think about it, the better it sounds. You've gotten away with murder, you know, Johnny."

"He's not the only one," Lester Morrow said suddenly.

Valerie threw him a glance. "No? Tell us, darling—I never thought of you as clever, my lamb."

Morrow shrugged. "It's all in what you consider clever. Now I would say a man who had committed two perfect crimes—murder, to be specific—was rather deserving of the adjective. I'd say that man ought to be considered quite clever."

"You might have something there," Johnny Meek said. "Who did you kill, Lester?"

"Him—kill anyone?" Valerie's laughter was raucous and cutting. "Why you couldn't kill a fly, Bunny."

Morrow winced. "Bunny"—that was the name a reporter on one of the scandal sheets had tagged on to the insignificant little Lester Morrow during the days that as many details of his multiple cuckoldry as could be gotten into print was on the front pages.

He frowned and set his drink down. "The first, I won't go in to," he said slowly. "It was done rather cleverly, but I hadn't really counted on it—and I rather think that anyone here could have done it as well. But the other one was a masterpiece." He picked up his glass and took a drink. "That involved poisoning the thorns of roses."

"You—you poisoned Arlene's roses!" Valerie's laughter swept out again and engulfed him. "You couldn't come near a *painted* rose, let alone a real one, without going into convulsions—let alone plan a murder!" The others joined in until the waves of laughter seemed to buffet him from one side of the room to the other.

"But—I did . . ." he started again, feebly.

Again the laughter. At last Johnny Meek raised his hand. "Come, come," he said mockingly, "we're not being fair. We haven't given him a chance to tell us how he managed to do it. Tell us, Bluebeard—how did you kill your wife, and doubtless innumerable others?"

Morrow opened his mouth—and suddenly realized that he didn't know the answer. How *did* he manage to poison those rose thorns? It had never occurred to him before to wonder; now it swept over him in a wave of horror.

He knew he had done it—but *how*?

Vaguely, he realized that the laughter was sweeping him away as he stumbled out of the room . . .

The next morning, he could still hear the laughter. He looked into his mirror, and thought, *I've committed two perfect crimes*—and the echoes of the laughter rose out of his image. It seemed as if the very reflection wore a mocking smile and whispered back to him, "How?"

How? How? How?

He thought, *I can go to the police*. He lived with the laughter a week before he did go to Lieutenant Dexter. Dexter was courteous; Dexter did not laugh. He listened to Morrow's story of the events of that day. And then he asked the fatal question.

And Lester Morrow could only shake his head. "But I can take you to the man from whom I rented the car, that day," he said eagerly. "I can show you where I drove, where I parked the car. There will be

records . . . they will identify me." He had forgotten momentarily that he had used a different name; it came to him now, and he added, "I didn't use my right name, of course, but they can identify me. The same man was there when I took the car and when I brought it back."

Dexter sighed. "Ordinarily, I wouldn't take the time—but you need help, Mr. Morrow. Let's go."

They drove to the car-renting agency, and Morrow saw the owner outside, talking to a customer. "That's the man," he said. "He'll identify me." He climbed out of the car, almost happily, and went forward . . .

And reeled and swayed as his eyes fell upon the man's lapel.

Time seemed to buckle around him, and the voices mocked and chortled. "Bunny Morrow—Bunny Morrow could never kill anyone!"

The spell passed, and he heard the owner of the car-renting place say, "Well—yeah—he does look a little like the guy who rented a car that day, but he couldn't be the one. Not if he always keels over when he sees roses. Because I wear a fresh rose in my lapel every morning. Every morning the missus cuts me one—we have a greenhouse so there's roses the year round. Loves them, she does, and so do I." He turned to his assistant who had come up to listen. "Ain't that so, Vincent?"

"It sure is, Lieutenant," said Bill Vincent. "Mr. Olsen hasn't missed wearing a rose a single day in five years. There's plenty of other people who can tell you that, too."

"So, you see Lieutenant," Olsen went on, "this couldn't be the guy, because the man who rented that car had a determined look about him. And he saw my rose—he was looking at it admiring-like—and it never bothered him for a minute."

Before they parted, Lieutenant Dexter said, "You see, you couldn't have done it. Maybe you felt like doing it. Maybe you had good reason to do it. Maybe you even planned you'd do it some day—but that's out of my line. I can't go after everyone he who thinks he'd *like* to kill someone or who has good reason to kill someone. Might have to turn myself in for that. Maybe you ought to see a doctor, Mr. Morrow."

That night, Dexter called Mrs. Morrow to make some friendly suggestions. Valerie was all too amenable.

But she wasn't the hurrying kind. She waited a few weeks, let Lester try to convince a few more people that he had committed two perfect crimes—one not worth discussing, because anyone might have done it. Then, one evening, when he came home, there was a visitor. A friendly man who was interested in Lester Morrow and who didn't laugh when he wanted to talk about his perfect crime—the one that was really perfect.

Valerie herself was kinder that evening; she gave every indication of being the warm, loving creature he had thought she was before they were married.

And the next day, Lester Morrow went to a quiet place for some tests—to see if there were any way in which he might really overcome his allergy, Valerie explained gently. She had signed all the necessary papers, and had satisfied the proper authorities that her husband's "vacation" expenses would be met.

V

REALLY, HE FELT QUITE CALM about it all. There was no other way, he decided, than gradually to convince them that he was not suffering from delusions; and perhaps in time they could help prove his own case.

He was surprised when The Visitor appeared within his room one night.

"Don't be alarmed," were the first words. "No one will overhear this conversation. And even if someone were to look in, they would not see me."

Morrow sighed. "You were right . . . So this is part of the price. I should have taken your warning—only, you knew that I wouldn't, didn't you?"

The Visitor shook his head. "It was a first order probability, with a negligible factor of failure, like your plan. Theoretically, you might have failed or Hamilton might not have been convicted. No guarantee is absolute when dealing with free wills, yours or mine, but my predictions have a very high percentage of accuracy. I have been entirely wrong once, and partially wrong four times, in the last half-century—this out of something like thousands of instances. That is good enough for confidence, wouldn't you say?"

Morrow nodded. "I guess so. What hope is there for me now?"

The Visitor sighed. "Yet, I have my limitations and frustrations, you know. More than you would believe. Sometimes I think that the only thing that keeps me from despair is an unshakable faith in human stupidity.

"You cannot win, Mr. Morrow. You had, as I predicted, three successes: the murder of Arlene, framing Hamilton—I agree that the incident with Irma hardly counts; and your persuading Valerie to marry you. Had you heeded my warning, you would not have suffered

the first failure—a disastrous second marriage. And barring that, you would not have been driven, out of sheer desperation for some measure of recognition, to try to convince people that you had done what is generally considered impossible. A ridiculous notion, like so many of your human notions—there are innumerable perfect murders, though yours was a particularly splendid one, I can say. Now you have a choice again, but it is only a choice between failures. Either one will require a painful loss."

"Which will be the more painful?"

The Visitor smiled. "The one to avoid which you are willing to bear the pain of the other. I do wish you humans would stop considering us equal to God, Mr. Morrow. Goodbye."

The room was empty again, and Morrow knew that this was indeed goodbye; he would not see The Visitor again.

What lay ahead of him if he *could* prove his point?

What lay ahead if he could not, and was willing to accept the fact?

If he gave up what they considered his delusion, he would be freed; even Valerie could not keep him here under those circumstances. A visit from his lawyer had left no doubt on that score.

No, he could get out, free, once they were satisfied here that he had really been cured, had given up his "delusion". But to do that, he would have to really believe what they said. Pretending wouldn't work. He'd have to come to the point where he really believed that Peter Hamilton had murdered Arlene Morrow, and that Lester Morrow's one great success—the one thing that set him apart from the world's opinion of him—had never happened. He would be amiable, bumbling Lester Morrow who somehow happened to pick partners who enabled him to make a lot of money, but was a non-entity otherwise. Poor Morrow, who could never win the love and respect of a woman who anyone else thought worth bothering about. Poor Morrow, whose wives cuckolded him right and left, but who was too weak to do anything about it.

So long as he held firm, no matter what they said, what they did, he could hold on to that one spark of pride; he could look upon their superiority with contempt, because he *knew* he had committed a perfect crime.

How could he bear to give that up?



Acrophobia

by L. Sprague de Camp

I hate tall buildings, for in each
There lurks a demon, who invades my mind
And flashes pictures on a screen. In soundless speech
He says to me: "You're leaning out—no danger will you find—
"As far as you can reach."

I see it plain as day: the files
Of glassy panes; the verticals—like rods
Converging to the center of the earth—of tiles.
He cries: "Come here! Look down and see the scuttling arthropods
"Below—it seems like miles!"

"Get on this chair!" he shrieks. "See there,
"The cars like beetles and the people, specks!"
And then another scene he shows: the toppling chair,
The hand that snatches at the sill with all-too-slow reflex,
The upward rush of air.

The loss of weight; the limbs that thrash
In vain; an upturned face; the tinny sound
Of screams. The bugs that swiftly wax to men. A flash
Of terror stark and infinite chagrin. The swooping ground,
And then the final smash.

At each enactment of this fate,
My scalp horripilates; my testes crawl.
Then off the demon goes, to dance and cachinate
On that unearthly plane wherein he dwells. And therefore all
Such buildings tall I hate.

Webbed Hands

by Ferdinand Berthoud

IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER THREE THAT MORNING when the drowsy policeman found her. The bright African moon threw clear-cut shadows, and the man stumbled into her before he knew she was there. In Rondebosch, Cape Town's most fashionable suburb, a woman lying rigid under a tree at that time of night was something quite out of the ordinary.

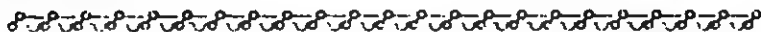
The policeman winced, then drew back and pushed the woman gently with his foot. A cape half-caste, loaded with brandy, she was bound to be. But the woman made no response to the policeman's prodding.

"There's no ape or other kind of animal could make those fingerprints. There's no African animal with webbed hands."

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illustration by H. W. Wesso



More puzzled, the man now took his old-fashioned lamp and twisted it and held it close above her. Disgustedly he flashed it over her from head to foot, then back again. The light at last stopped, and shone full on the face. The eyes were wide open, staring; uncannily staring. But the woman obviously was dead. And the woman was white, and distinctly respectable.

At that time of night in 1930, no traffic at all went along that secluded road, and the officer left her as she was without fear of her being further molested, and reached the station half a mile away.

A sergeant, a doctor and couple of plainclothesmen returned with him. Careful as possible not to obliterate tracks the doctor stood close to the woman and stooped to examine her. No signs of violence or any struggle were there, yet the face and eyes told of indescribable terror. Guided by the lights of the lanterns the doctor examined her for broken bones and searched for traces of blood, but without result. Then the doctor took the stiffening wrists. The next instant he was standing straight and serious.

"The zoo," he said. "The open air zoo up at Groote Schuur. Some dangerous beast has escaped, and still must be at large."

In the sharp shadows cast by the trees the men all suddenly looked about them. Then, following the doctor's pointing finger, they came back to the ghastly business at their feet. The finger indicated the woman's wrists, and traced around them. Each plainclothesman holding one of her hands, the officer turned his light onto them. The wrists had been gripped by something with tremendous strength, and still held deep purple marks.

"Some kind of ape," the doctor decided. "Too big to be any baboon, and a baboon wouldn't have quite such terrible power. And I don't really see how she was killed, or if she was killed, except by fear."

The sergeant leaned close, too, and for several minutes scanned one of the wrists intently. He then called for a light to be held beneath it; he examined the marks intently, and at last shook his head with great finality.

"I know every animal up at Groote Schuur better than I know you, Doctor," he declared, "and I was born in up-country Africa and have been tens of thousands of miles through it. There's no ape or other kind of animal could make those fingerprints. There's no African animal with webbed hands."

There was an awed silence as one after another each man took careful stock of the dark purple marks. Undoubtedly they were bruises. Each finger, bone for bone, was distinctly traced, but the fingers were connected nearly to their tips with closely woven nets. The hands that had made these marks were webbed as the feet of a duck or, perhaps, as those of a frog.

"No," the doctor admitted presently, and there was a shudder in his voice. "Those hands certainly do not belong to any animal, and

they most emphatically don't appear to belong to any human being. What mysterious thing can have done it — and why?"

The sergeant looked the other directly in the eyes. "I don't know, Doctor. I told you I'd been tens of thousands of miles in this old Africa of ours. I have seen and heard much, and I've found there are many things old Africa never will tell."

The doctor nodded slowly. "And I expect she won't tell us this either, eh?"

Dawn was but two hours away, and any investigation might destroy rather than produce evidence. The ground mostly was strewn with dead leaves, and looking for footprints was out of the question. Moving the woman, too, before daylight, might only mutilate some clue, and, as she most assuredly was past all aid, it was best to leave her where she was. Together, but at a slight distance away, the officer and the two plainclothesmen arranged to stay and guard her.

The inquiry that morning led to nothing, save horror and disgust. The dead woman was a Miss Van Rooyen, a lady of but twenty-six, with no known enemies, involved in no love affair and quite contented with life; a woman of no occupation, living at home and of the upper middle class. An autopsy showed no injuries or signs of poison, and the verdict was as her staring eyes had indicated — she had died of fright.

Yet a check-up of the denizens of the huge zoo which runs along the side of Table Mountain showed every animal to be exactly where it was expected, and the fallen leaves where the body was found held no track of any approaching or departing assailant. For a week Cape Town, a city where murders and mysteries are few, shuddered and wondered, then gradually strove to forget.

At the end of the second week following a man named Martin, coming up over the Kloof from Camp's Bay close to midnight, noticed what he took to be an animal crouching at the side of the road. Camp's Bay was a small pleasure-beach suburb of Camp Town, and at least eight miles from Rondebosch and any zoo, and that didn't seem right. What was more the animal wasn't about when he had come over earlier in daylight, and its very stillness was disconcerting.

The man, for safety's sake, kept on for a while after he had passed it, then stopped and peered at it in the gloom. To all appearances it hadn't moved and didn't intend to molest him, so, gaining courage, he threw a stone at it. No answering growl or movement came.

More from curiosity than anything else Martin went cautiously back to investigate what had scared him and, with a lighted match, slowly

approached it. A rock which had become loosened and had rolled from Devil's Peak, it now looked to be.

With a fresh match he bent and gazed down at it, then jumped back with a startled gasp. A woman, stretched flat on her back, was lying there, with open eyes staring straight toward the skies.

For an instant the man scarcely grasped it, then looked more closely at the face. No flicker was visible, no sign of life whatsoever.

Excitedly Martin chased back down the mountain road and hunted up the only policeman the suburb possessed. With an hotel man who was late retiring they hastened up the twisting track to where it became nearly lost in the murk of trees. There, just as Martin had left it, was the stark, cold body of the woman.

A hasty examination told just what they all expected, for the other horror at once flashed to their minds. In the light of the policeman's lamp the three looked expectantly at the wrists, and neither had much to say.

Each wrist bore the deep purple impress of a cruel grip tight almost as any vise, and the separate bones of every finger were distinct. The fingers, as easily seen, were joined together by webbing. This might have been the work of a human duck or an enormous frog.

As before, the woman was cold and past all aid, and Martin and the policeman decided to stay with her till daylight. But the light of dawn disclosed no clues; there were no significant footmarks, and no signs of any struggle were to be found.

And the autopsy was as unsuccessful as the previous one. Barring the gruesomely apparent, vicious grip-holds the body bore no evidences of violence whatsoever. The woman, a Miss Coetzee, in her late twenties, was well known and respected and, to all indications, quite satisfied with life. The purple marks gave a denial to suicide, the staring eyes shouted only "fear". That was all that the dead girl's body could say.

The sensation this time lasted much longer, for in a district where there are lonely wooded lanes and roads people sprinkle those spots with wraiths and ghouls, but in that happy, sunny clime the terror at length wore off. Soon life took up its usual course once more.

A stable attendant at the Wynberg race course, getting off an early train from Cape Town, in the dark took a short cut from the station. The attendant was somewhat drunk and wanted to get to bed.

At a cross roads a couple of hundred yards from the course in passing under trees the boy tripped and stumbled over something, and, in

his muddled condition, staggered and trotted a dozen feet or so before he could regain his balance. The obstacle in the shadow looked solid and bulky, and he struck a match and leaned over it to get a fuller view. Two bulging, staring eyes, now dead but still evincing terror, gleamed up at him.

The boy let out a howl, and the next instant was rushing away as one demented, for from the eyes his gaze had shot down along two arms, and had glimpsed two swollen, purple wrists.

There was no one there on guard, of course, when the boy and the police arrived, but it didn't matter, for when daylight came there was still the same lack of evidence; just a woman lying cold and stiff.

All Cape Town now was aroused, and the sensation became country-wide. The lack of success in accounting for the first two deaths and in bringing anyone or anything to account for either was intensified by the failure in the third, and for weeks on end no woman under thirty would venture anywhere except in full daylight, and where there was a crowd.

This last one was a Miss de Wet, of but twenty-five and without love troubles or any known worry, and the risk was too staggering for any other such ladies to assume.

The deaths from fear still were a common topic of conversation well on into February, but the African woman is no continual coward. Soon one by one they strolled out again of an evening in the glorious sub-tropical short dusk. The past terror eventually was difficult to imagine—until one night a panting, blubbing native boy came running in, and the terror instantly took on a touch of the supernatural.

The police found the pitiful woman as the native had reported, and, as with the others, here eyes were open and bulged in their sockets. The wrists, straight down at her sides, bore the same token of a savage hold, but, as one of the investigators before had insisted, they led to one certain definite conclusion.

The thing in each case had instantly frightened the life out of the woman as she stood, and then had laid her gently down. An animal wouldn't do it, no human being *could* do it. What else could carry such unfathomable, uncontrollable fear?

The fifth woman was found three weeks later, and the sixth, another Miss Van Rooyen, at the end of a further month. Then a circumstance, quite apparent, but never before laid stress on, suddenly flashed in front of the African world.

All six women had been either closely or distantly related. Who or what in their families could take such vindictive toll?

A tall, dark, shadowy thing passed a Hottentot woman, and almost touched her in its hurry. The thing made no sound as it ran, and the eeriness made her turn and stare after it. A hundred yards back the shadow was still more flimsy, but two glowing, piercing, flaming eyes peered toward and through her.

The Hottentot screamed and ran, then cut through the trees on the Camp Ground. Next moment she was flat on her face, but the screaming didn't stop for a second. By the body of the seventh victim of fear she collapsed and, until rescued, used all the power of lung that the brush had given her. But she never could describe what she had seen.

This seventh, a Miss Helen Blaikie, and again a relative of the others, at once was claimed by her startled, sorrowing parents, but held by the police while her elder brother could be communicated with. The brother, Langford Blaikie, though living alone and isolated as any hermit, had long since established himself as the director of family affairs, and the parents, now aging, had become accustomed to looking to him for everything. At the moment Langford happened to be two days distance away up-country in Johannesburg. On his arrival the body was handed over to him without any comment whatever other than an expression of condolence, and was buried as just another of Africa's unexplainable tragedies.

A week after the girl had been consigned to her grave, and after having taken care of all expenses, Langford Blaikie made application for the amount of his sister's insurance. The policy was for three thousand pounds, and was signed over to him. The insurance company, knowing every incident of the young woman's murder and knowing the relationship, made payment without any demur. Then the check was paid into the bank.

A ledger clerk in the Standard Bank, holding the check in his hand and having been unduly interested in the sequence of grisly mysterious, happened that day to be in the humor to think. The clerk looked at a list of dates on a sheet of paper taken from his pocket, then checked the dates up with the account in front of him. The dates approximately tallied. This was the seventh unsolved ghostly murder, and the seventh insurance check which had been paid in, while each check had been issued by a different insurance company. The clerk held his breath, and his eyes narrowed.

The ledger clerk sought the bank manager, and put the matter before him. The manager had an idea, too, that the coincidences needed explaining. At the police station, though not formally arrested or even charged or threatened, Langford Blaikie was asked a few pointed questions. Never,

however, was a man more willing, in so far as he could, to tell anything they wished to know.

It was quite correct, he admitted, that he had held policies on the lives of each of the seven women who met their deaths by some unknown means. He always had had spare money, and was willing to help any of his relatives, no matter how distant. That was the reason for the policies. In each case he had lent money to the deceased, and the policies had been taken out and signed over to him as security. The women had signed them over to him voluntarily.

A quiet gentleman standing by asked sardonically if any women still living had given him their policies.

To the ready reply that three women had done so, the caustic bystander remarked, "They'll need more than insurance policies to take care of them now." Blaikie made no retort whatever. Anyone not knowing the facts of the case might have considered Blaikie as some philanthropist eager to help a good cause.

Yes, he had been trading and traveling in Central Africa for a number of years, Blaikie explained, but now had settled on his tiny farm and was leading a retired life. Occasionally he did a little business and speculating, but always in the Transvaal or other parts far away. No, he could give no reason for the murders, in fact he hadn't had full particulars of all of them, for in every case when they occurred he was a thousand or more miles from Cape Town. This, as it happened, he easily and conclusively could prove.

The sardonic man had a leading query: had he been the one to first approach the women on the money question, or had they approached him? Without an instant's falter Blaikie admitted that it was his own idea. That one of the Miss Van Rooyens had spoken to him of her wish to take up art, and of her financial leanness, and that he'd then suggested the loan and the policy to secure it, and had told her that he'd do the same for any other of his friends. The others had approached him.

The inquiry seemed as though it could progress no further, for the man had the women's notes and agreements; then the sardonic man asked another question: Why, when the dead women had borrowed comparatively small sums, had he kept the whole of the amount they were insured for—always three thousand or three thousand, five hundred pounds?

Beaming, Langford Blaikie enlightened him. He had paid their premiums for them, therefore the entire sum was his.

The other then fired his final shot. Wouldn't it be safer for the surviving three of Langford's debtors if they had their policies canceled?

Blaikie smiled indulgently, but shook his head.

The questioning came to a finish, with nothing worth while gained. With most men Blaikie's ready, pleasant answers served their purpose, but to the sardonic one and a watching detective they shouted guilty knowledge. Any actual sorrow at the loss of a sister or other relatives was utterly lacking, while his brazen insistence on carrying all business through to the end gave evidence of utter callousness. The man was cognizant of every detail of the crimes and behind them. There was no doubt of that.

Then five weeks later the eighth dead woman with purple wrists and wildly staring eyes was found on a lonely lane.

Blaikie came back from another trip to Johannesburg and, casually and coolly made claim for payment of the insurance. Settlement this time, however, was flatly refused. Later that day the detective who had silently watched and the sardonic one paid him an informal visit at his farm, and, suave and bland as anyone would be to the closest of cronies, he cordially welcomed them. Though the conversation was harshly pointed Blaikie carried on as if he were discussing ordinary topics of the day.

The next morning he was arrested on the tentative charge of conspiracy, booked and put into jail. But even then he only protested at the hurt to his feelings and dignity, spoke of actions for criminal libel, and laughed at any fear of further trouble.

Three days later he applied for release on bail and, as the charge at bottom was little better than bluff, was released on a cash bond of two thousand pounds.

The sardonic man smiled as Blaikie left for his farm.

The tall, overcoated, gloved man opened the door of Blaikie's gloomy house and walked boldly in out of the dark. The house was silent, the message had said all servants would be away.

The man stepped in and, in the glow from an oil lamp, his yellow-brown face appeared expressionless and stolid. Somewhat flat and dull, it seemed, and unwrinkled, with a slightly beaklike nose. Blaikie rose from a chair, but he did not offer to shake hands.

"Hello, Trundle," he said. "You got my note, eh?"

"Of course I did, or I wouldn't be here. And you wouldn't have risked sending it unless there was trouble. What is it?"

"Sit down," Blaikie suggested. "Take your coat off, and sit down."

The tall man still stood, expressionless. "What is it?" he repeated, doggedly. "What is it?"

Blaikie took a step and was close to him, and looked him straight in the eyes, then jerked his head away. "No, Trundle, there isn't trouble — yet. Sit down. Be comfortable."

The man had removed his gloves, and a hand shot out like a talon. The hand gripped Blaikie's arm, and drew him up so that their faces almost touched.

"You lie, you rat!" Trundle grated. "You've turned jackal. You want to turn traitor on me."

Blaikie looked again at the face before him, then held his head to one side. The man's eyes were half closed, but they pierced like snaky rapiers, and their venomous flash hypnotized and dazed Blaikie.

"I haven't," he asserted. "I just want to talk to you. I want to discuss the future. Sit down."

The unlined skin now had changed, and was flickering and working as would the cheeks of some demoniac, fantastic monkey in a dream, the mouth gibbered as in pantomime, and the wide-drawn, open lips showed long yellow teeth between pointed tigerlike fangs. "You lie! You've planted listeners. You lie!"

Still looking away, Blaikie made a vigorous effort and tore himself free. "Would I set a trap for my own self to fall into?"

"You'd do anything, you coward! You rat!"

Blaikie slumped back into his chair, while the other stood silent and glowering. Trundle's eyes alternately flashed brighter and dimmer as the pulsing light of a glowworm's or firefly's tail. For a scant moment Blaikie's mind shot back into the far interior of the continent, and to the swampy shores of Lake Mqobo. To the day when he'd seen Trundle, naked, filthy and savage, seize a native boy and hold him and peer at him until he dropped dead.

"I've got to do something now," Blaikie said, at last.

The other stayed just where he was. "You mean you think these people know more than you imagined? You mean you want to get out and away?"

"No," Blaikie corrected. "I mean *you've* got to go away."

Trundle's face came to a grin, and the grin was that of a demon. "Why me, when they don't know me and you're the only one they know of who has gained?"

"Why you? Because you can slip out of it without hurting yourself,

of course," Blaikie told him. "The thing's come to an end, Trundle, and you can go back whence I brought you without risk. You've done your share."

"And supposing I don't choose to go back?" the grinning one rasped.

Again in a forced lull Blaikie's mind flashed in memory to the place of their meeting, to the scheme which that meeting had conjured up. A vindictive, dirty, brown savage who didn't seem human and couldn't be human, this man was then, one who lived in the swamps, and who, in water, was like a fish. Yet he spoke English and could read and write. He must in some part be an ordinary being.

The man had told Blaikie that his father had been a renegade English promoter and stockbroker, a man who'd committed crime on vile crime and then had vanished alone into the center of Africa to escape vengeance and justice. A brutally vicious man, that father must have been. Yet as a hobby he'd been a teacher to this thing!

And of his mother? There was no wife when the man had first come to Africa, and her disappearance and the curse of it were part of his coming. "I never knew who my mother was," Trundle admitted; "or what."

The eyes staring at Blake at last burned, and he came suddenly to the present. The thing before him now appeared as fateful as it must have to the boy he had seen him kill.

"You will go, Trundle. I've arranged it all. There's my bank balance; look at it; and I've drawn out an exact half. I want you to write and sign a confession taking every murder and the planning of every murder wholly on your shoulders, then take this half and the first train north."

"What?" came a shout, that sent a shudder along Blaikie's spine.

Blaikie opened a drawer in the table near him and pulled out a bundle of notes and a sheet of paper. He tossed the notes over to his visitor.

"They know I brought you down here two years ago, Trundle," he said, inwardly shivering, "but they lost track of you long since. Now I want you either to go back into the bush or into Portuguese territory where there's no extradition, or to Madagascar. You rewrite this confession, and two days after you leave I'll send it to a friend and get it posted back to me as from you on the way. That'll end all trouble for us both."

"Suppose I make *you* the one to go?" the other said, quietly.

"I've thought of that argument," Blaikie informed him. "I've prepared for it." Then of a sudden his fear completely disappeared.

Trundle looked into the muzzle of the revolver which was pointed

at him, and at the eyes which were close behind it. The glare which the fierce eyes held was as baneful as that of his own.

"Take that pen, Trundle," Blaikie ordered, "and sit down and write. You'll notice I make you say that for some personal injury I did you you've come to hate me, and have been wreaking vengeance by destroying all my friends. That's a telling start, isn't it? Over to your right here, behind you is a small safe built into the wall at the back of a picture. Inside it are photos of you that I took when first I found you running naked. The confession will go into it with the photos until the time you are safely away. Only I know the combination or situation of the safe. Don't you think that's a certain and clever scheme to clear myself?"

"Yes," Trundle agreed, through lips in a face which was unearthly. "And part of it's true. I wish I could make you feel what deadly hate really means."

"Write!" Blaikie said, again.

A hand came high in the air, and opened up like a rubber fan. The savage, demon-like features quivered and knotted, and the open lips twitched round yammering teeth. The man made a single step forward, and his left hand gripped the bundle of notes as if to throw them. For an instant he held them, then dropped them into a pocket.

"All right," he consented. "I'll go. Yes, I'll go—but where I go you'll come with me."

"Will I?" Blaikie asked.

For minutes the man sat and wrote, while his left hand, steadying the copy, opened and closed like a leathery pulse. The confession was finished and signed. Trundle stood up.

"There you are," he announced. "There's your death warrant, Blaikie. And I won't say good-by."

"No need," the other countered, with grim intent.

The man slowly backed to the closed door, his narrowed eyes glinting like polished steel. The yammering mouth now was firm and set, yet the cheeks carried knife-like lines. A hand, fumbling at his back, felt for the door knob, and touched it.

"A death warrant," he repeated, turning to leave.

Then a bullet soughed into him from behind, and without a murmur he crashed to the floor.

A smile spread over Blaikie's bronzed, forty-year-old face, and, calm and satisfied, he slid the revolver back into a drawer. Deliberately he walked over to the awful thing, and for a second stood looking down.

In his mind he went over the perfection of his plans, even to the spare sheets of linoleum he had placed at the door to avoid the washing-out of bloodstains on carpet or boards. More inquisitively he leaned over to inspect his work. There was his money! What an expert job!

Blaikie stooped and gripped the dead man's coat with the intention of turning the corpse over. With a gasp and as though bitten by a snake he jumped back. The body had fallen with the thud of an ordinary heavy man, but now there was nothing but clothing covering an empty skin.

Where there should have been blood was but a trickle as of white glue.

Shuddering, almost to nausea, Blaikie collapsed backwards and sat and held onto the edge of the table. Sudden fear of something further he didn't understand throttled him, and he stared with terrorstricken eyes. Alive, he could argue and fence with a thing which was partly man, but the ghastly, limp, leathery empty bag before him was a mysterious, threatening omen of dead devilishness. Blaikie trembled despite himself.

With a struggle Blaikie got to his feet, and drank a huge four fingers of brandy. After a second and third dose he once more plucked up courage to approach the shrunken clothes. The thing was dead, he consoled himself, whatever black wraith it might leave, and in any case he must get it out of sight.

Blaikie took still another drink, then pushed the thing aside and passed out into the night. In a wooden shed at the far side of a yard he already had dug a grave, and he went over to it and lighted a lamp he previously had left there. Listening intently for the sound of any chance passing wanderer he then retraced his steps to the house.

As a collapsed sack of very light bones Blaikie lifted the vile thing easily, though distastefully, and carried it over to the shed. With as little ceremony as burying a rat he cast the corpse into the hole. Half drunk, yet sweating furiously, he shoveled dirt over it, then, beating it almost level, took the lamp and moved away.

In a semi-trance he slumped into a chair, and sprawled there unconscious till well on into morning.

Dusk had come, and Blaikie again sat in the room of the safe. The confession now was but paper which never might be used, the whole affair but grisly history. The only thing which had actual knowledge of the genesis of the crimes had passed to where its voice never could be raised.

The room became dark, and Blaikie still sat on. Fearing, though content, he lingered long and drowsed. It was done, quite done, and now would come peace and the struggle to forget.

Blaikie's drowse soon lapsed into a dream in which he found himself in a forest, and he thought he heard the scrape of an insect boring in wood. The forest came nearer, and the scrape soon was real and loud. Instantly awake and alive, he listened to a busy "tick, tick, tick," and it seemed the borer was with him. At once it was—a borer in the wall.

The man got up to find the panel it was in, but his search already was arranged for him. Something gripped him, held him, forced him and led him to the safe. A power he couldn't see held his hands and, through an open panel, pressed them on the combination of the safe. Wreching and squeezing, the power held the wrists and made the hands twist the knob. His fingers fumbled, tingled, froze.

Then nausea came. The safe unopened, he crumpled soggly in a swoon.

The next day Blaikie came to himself, and shakily got to his feet. Hands to forehead, for a while he staggered about to collect his mind. The servants still were away and would be until he sent for them, nothing was known, and he'd keep out of the room for the time being and hide from the thing. Last night must have been one of overtaxed imagination; a nightmare—that was all.

Blaikie lifted a hand higher to smooth his hair and, as it rose, it passed his eyes. His eyes flickered, then the eyes bulged wide. On the wrist was a deep purple mark—a hand with fingers which were webbed. The other hand, shudderingly, was held up for inspection. That wrist, too, had a purple bruise.

Then Blaikie laughed.

Under a tree that night they found him—dead, apparently, and staring at the stars. On each wrist was the dreaded webbed grip mark.

How could he be the murderer when the real murderer had attacked him, too?

He was too utterly scared, he explained later, on coming to, to be able to give an exact description of his assailant; but no one asked why he, alone, of all was the only one who should recover.

For two days the man with the fear of notoriety, was laid up, and then it came to him there could be no use holding the confession longer when all need for hiding it had gone. He'd finish the thing for all time, and get it off his mind. With a strange shrinking he turned the combination

of the safe to produce the document, then automatically looked it over. Instantly and dazedly he paled and winced.

The terror had dated the paper without his noticing it, and had dated it a month earlier than the night of his visit. He must have seen into the future. How could Blaikie account for its coming to him through the mail and from a great distance when the writer of it had been here at that date?

As Blaikie reached over to replace the paper, his sleeve slipped back. Almost believing, he glanced from one to the other of the wrists. The purple marks had disappeared and the wrists were clear and natural. Still almost unbelieving, but happy, he pulled the sleeves a little higher.

The hideousness yet was there—and they were working up his arms!

Frightened to the verge of illness Blaikie remained in his house, but the room now had an irresistible influence over him, and much of his time was spent in it. And at dusk toward the end of the week he drowsed at the table by the safe.

A "click-click" presently broke in on his sleep, and instantly he was wide awake. For half an hour he sat helplessly and stared. Not a mist or a thing could be seen, no vapory movement, no slightest stir, yet the clicking went patiently on.

The clicking came to a stop, and still the man kept watching. A tiny breeze, almost visible, rustled round the picture, then he felt a coldness close in front of him. The next second a vise-like grip had him by both shoulders, and slowly was drawing him up.

Blaikie attempted to struggle and wriggle out, tried to scream and shout for non-existent help, but the grip moved him ruthlessly forward and held him before the picture. Cruelly squeezing and pinching, the thing held the hands past the opened panel, and guided them to clutch and turn the combination, then Blaikie gasped and his tongue went dry.

He fell to the floor, and lay insensible.

Blaikie rose dazedly from out of his stupor and, mouthing with fear, threw himself upon his bed. The knowledge that he had been relentlessly using a weapon he couldn't control and which now was turned full force on him clawed into his very soul. The spots where the unseen thing had gripped him already were burning, and the urge to rub them was intense. The burning at last became unbearable, and he frantically tore away his clothes.

On each shoulder was the purple mark of a webbed hand.

With a sickly sense of impending doom he lay in a state of coma till the break of dawn.

For three days Blaikie kept from the room of the safe, though the place seemed to reach out and pull him. The longing to leave the house altogether was overwhelming, but the strain of keeping away was as bad as the terror itself. And each day the marks by degrees crept higher, crept past the shoulders, bridged his neck, touched the edge of his jaws.

The marks swiftly crawled up his cheeks, drew to the bottoms of his eyes, stretched above them, soon a thumbmark went over each lid, and the purple stain was as on fire.

Then of a sudden the thumbs began to press with a horrible, burning intensity.

Blaikie howled as he sensed the meaning of the first touch of torture, and rushed for water. The water only seemed to sizzle and scald and add to the fierceness of the burns. Incoherently mouthing he turned in despair toward the door of the fateful room, but the fire, he found, had dimmed his sight. As a blind man he staggered and blundered on until he fell into a chair beside a table. Moaning and drooling, he rocked backward and forward and, fearing, yet hoping, listened for the ghostly clicks.

But something gripped him without warning and, unconsciously, he worked without knowing what he did.

The sun streamed in when he awoke, and he opened his eyes and looked around him. To his amazement no pain was left, and the nervousness and nausea had gone. Fresh and limber he rose from where he was, and stepped to the nearest mirror.

In it he saw his face clean and clear as on any day in his life.

Delighted, yet unconvinced, he removed part of his clothing. Not a mark or blemish was to be seen, not a sign. The horror had left with the confession, and his body and his mind once more were his own.

All that day Blaikie stayed at home to straighten himself and things out, and the next morning he'd face the world. There was nothing to fear in publicity now; he felt that he was now the one to be pitied. He might even for the sake of sympathy give hints of the terror he'd been through.

The man rose after his first natural sleep, and bathed and put on clean clothes. For the moment he imaged himself a hero, and that he must dress and live the part. With a kettle of boiling water he presently went back to the bathroom, and made ready for a much-needed shave.

Light-hearted, and almost gay, Blaikie rubbed lather on a week-old stubble then. He looked away for a moment and mechanically scraped

his upper lip and chin. The stubble came off, and he peered into a mirror to observe his progress—then the razor crashed, broken, to the floor.

Over his mouth was a deep purple gripping webbed hand—the Hand of Silence—and there was no way of getting it off.

In a panic Blaikie stopped. His shave had become a thing quite useless; his clean clothes were wasted. Like a demented man he wandered aimlessly about the house for another week waiting for another slight coating of hair. With his face covered sufficiently to hide instant notice of the stain, and with a little artificial aid, he at last ventured out and closed the house, and then without a word to a soul took a train north, into the Great Karroo. For a month he lay hidden in a Kaffir hut in the desert, and prayed that the sun and his beard might blacken his face till he never again would be known.

A bill collector calling at Blaikie's house, now reputed haunted, was the first to break the spell, and he wanted to know where he might apply for his money. Only then did the mystery of the tenantless house and the missing man link themselves together. And only then did a colored woman remember having seen a light in a shed one night, and gossiping, let out that she'd crept up barefooted and watched a man filling a hole.

The police took her to show them the shed, and evidence of something having been buried was at once apparent. Recollection of the farmer having been attacked instantly assured them that he'd again been assailed, then killed and buried. Investigation caused the diggers suddenly to know differently, and to recoil, horrified.

The bag of skin inside the clothes at length was dragged out and several observers timidly prodded it. The thing had a human head, which, terrible when alive, was now ever more awesome. More courageous than the others, one man reached into the corpse's pocket, and an overlooked draft of a confession came to light. The confession was in Blaikie's handwriting.

At once, and with the safety of numbers, more diligent examination was made, and, after the webbed hands, the bullet hole in the back was exposed. Looking queerly from one to the others the searchers all guessed the same thing.

Blaikie was behind every crime, this was his agent, danger had come and he'd sacrificed the man he had hired and had fled. Then others related the bringing of the mysterious man from the interior two years before, and the whole thing was absurdly apparent.

Word came to a doctor at a station in the Karroo that a white man, lying in a native hut, was dangerously ill, and the doctor rode over to him. The man, he found, was pitifully weak, and unable to explain just what was the matter with him, and the doctor had to make thorough examination. Under the straggly beard and moustache, he discovered, were dark, unpleasant-looking stains, and those appeared to be part of the disease.

The man wasn't strong enough to resist, and the doctor shaved him clean. Then the doctor did some quick thinking. The hunt for the missing murderer had been blazoned across the country, and no other man marked thus would have reason to hide among natives.

The Hand of Silence spoke out of its own !

A cured man, ready to fight, but not knowing all that was ahead of him, Blaikie came back as a prisoner to Cape Town. A sullen crowd stood in court, staring at Blaikie's hands which he immediately tried to conceal from gaze.

"An accessory before and after the fact in every case," the prosecutor declared. "The actual murderer in one case."

"Of *whom*?" Blaikie's counsel asked, before the court could stop him.

"Of Trundle," the public prosecutor said, condescendingly. But Blaikie's man followed on with a sarcastic "But of *what*?"

With the inexorable precision of a British court the judge pronounced the death sentence, and the sentence was the end of argument. The man had to die—after three Sundays following the verdict. That was all.

With brain dull and gloomy Blaikie paced up and down his short cell and counted the hours. Tomorrow at sunrise—the dawn of the last day. A rope, an instant twinge—and nothing more. Ah!—but the horror leading up to it?

Dusk came and the jail was lighted, and a guard sat outside the door, but still Blaikie walked up and down. A march of madness, a march of torment, but never a flicker of penance. He had only sorrow for himself, and bitterness at defeat.

The night passed, and hurrying soft steps paddled over the corridor. A last quick, cautious inspection to see that all preparations were in order. But one half hour more and then a blank. Weary, numb, stomach sickening, Blaikie paced back and forth, his feet independent of his brain, his brain a rattling void. The end was near . . .

Something stood inside the cell, and Blaikie collided with it and felt it. A cold, still wind it seemed, and the wind had weight and shape. Dazed,

Blaikie stopped and wondered, then peered senselessly at the unseen. His hand went out to touch it; then his eyes went wide and never again closed.

Something clutched the hand, then seized the other one, while two ghostly eyes which only he could see bored into his own. A steely grip hugged him closer, till the eyes appeared to meet and become part of his own. Retching, he opened his mouth to shout. He gagged, he struggled for breath; but his lips only stayed fixed and wide apart. His head seemed to be filled with hot ice . . .

The guard, peeping through the slit in the door, saw the look of frenzied horror on Blaikie's features. He hurriedly slipped the bolt and rushed in. But it was finished.

Slowly, stiffly, Blaikie sagged backward, and lay with purpling wrists. The Hand of Silence had stroked him !



decoration by Hugh Rankin

THE EDITOR'S PAGE (Continued from page 5)

as I close this issue, I am engaged (when time permits) in photocopying pages from the March 1932 issue, which that veteran enthusiast, *Robert A. Madle* courageously loaned me for the purpose. I trust that by the time you read this, the copy will have been satisfactorily reassembled and safely received back. This leaves me lacking only the January 1933 issue of *STRANGE TALES*.

The Reckoning: Several have complained about a lack of correlation between the issue generally discussed in the readers' letters and the issue reported upon in *The Reckoning*, as the letters are nearly always one issue behind this. Why not hold *The Reckoning* back, they ask, so that we can see how the stories actually discussed came out?

This is something I've been reluctant to do, since it would mean giving the rundown on an issue six months, rather than only three months, back; but the point is so valid a one, I can't argue it. The letter department has to be made up at least six weeks earlier than *The Reckoning*; and as a rule, very few letters have come in on the latest issue at that time. After soul-searching, and considering the fact

that actually it is two issues back that you read about in the letter section, for the most part, I yield both to your wishes and to just plain common sense. So you will not see a *Reckoning* on the Spring #8 issue this time; the letters will deal with Winter #7. Correlation starts now.

This issue of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* might be called a special "Devil" number, since we have three stories dealing with different aspects of Satan, as it were. Col. Meek's *The Black Mass*, is rooted in Roman Catholic teaching and tradition. Jay Tyler's *The Sight Of Roses*, concerns a Deal With The Devil, but presents quite a different picture of that worthy—one which you might see in a science fiction magazine, except that the story really isn't science fiction at all. And *Hollywood Horror* is another in the Ernst series of tales about the duel between Ascot Keane and the super-criminal who calls himself "Doctor Satan". There is always a danger of "sameness" about this sort of thing, but I would not have let it happen were I not convinced that the danger is averted by the individuality of each of the three tales. RAWL

Hollywood Horror

by Paul Ernst

(author of *Doctor Satan, The Man Who Chained The Lightning*)

THE CENTRAL SOUND STAGE on the lot of the R-G-R Motion Picture Company was almost ready for the shooting of the main scene in the company's latest production of 193-. Outside the square, windowless concrete building the massive doors were being closed. In a moment the red light would burn which would keep anyone from

Under the lights, all could see the ghastly thing that was happening to the face of one of the most beautiful stars of the screen . . .

entering and ruining the sound effect. Inside, all was tense activity and bustle.

The inside of the sound stage had an eerie, cavernous look. One huge room, it was dark and shadowy at its outer fringes, and its high ceiling was lost in darkness. Shadows of people and things appeared like soundless prehistoric monsters.

Far above in the semi-darkness were shadowy platforms along which electricians were moving as they shifted scenic lights and equipment. An electric crane purred like a giant cat as it moved a heavy bit of scenery.

In the corner of the sound stage a set was being completed. It was for the picture, *Enchanted Castle*, in which the great star, Joan Harwell, had the leading role.

Men were hauling huge "sun-spots," incandescent globe spotlights, to platforms on three sides of the set. "Baby spots" also were being fixed in place to give a beautiful backlight effect on Miss Harwell's bronze hair.

All was prosaic, business-like, commonplace to the moving-picture industry. And yet . . .

One of the electricians, who was trundling a baby spot into position, shivered suddenly. He was a small man, partly bald, with a sensitive, thin face. He had wide blue eyes which, at the moment, glistened with something more than apprehension in the dusk of the great stage.

He paused beside another electrician, a burly, phlegmatic man, as he got the spot to the right position to play on Miss Harwell's head when she sat in the divan around which the forthcoming scene centered. His hand touched the burly man's shoulder.

"Bill," he half whispered, looking embarrassedly around to make sure he wouldn't be overheard, "do you feel it too?"

"Feel what?" grunted the big man.

The smaller man cleared his throat, plainly torn between a desire to speak what was in his mind, and a fear that he might be thought a fool. Desire won over fear.

"There's a kind of funny feel to this joint today," he muttered finally. "I've never noticed it in here before, but I can sure notice it this afternoon!"

"What are you talking about?" demanded the big man. "What kind of a feel?"

"I . . . don't exactly know how to describe it." The smaller man stared aloft at the spidery forms of workmen on the cat-walk, and then

glanced almost fearfully at the set which had been constructed for the afternoon's shooting. "It gives me the willies, that's all."

The big man stared around, with his forehead wrinkling. "It's kind of quiet, like everybody was holding their breath," he said. "But it's always like that when we're about to shoot."

"No—it's more than that," babbled the smaller man. His hand on the big man's arm became a frantic clutch. "God, Bill, something's going to happen in here today. Something awful—something not on the director's program. I can feel it. I *know* it!"

He moistened dry lips.

"I remember once feeling like this when I was a kid. I've always been funny about feeling things—a spirit medium called me psychic, once. Anyway, this time I was just going into a picture show. I was about fourteen, I guess, and I went with a couple of other kids. When we got inside the theater I almost turned around and went out. I didn't know why. I just felt that something was going to—happen. I tried to get the others to leave with me, and they only laughed. I couldn't explain my feeling, you see. I said I felt that something terrible was going to happen in that theater, and we ought to get out before it did. But — they only laughed. We stayed."

Even in the half-light the whiteness of the man's face was perceptible.

"Bill, it happened, all right. That theater was the Mohawk Theater in Chicago. Everybody still remembers the name—and the fire that destroyed it and killed half the people in it. That was what happened, and I was the only one of the crowd of us who went in that got out alive."

He wiped sweat from his face.

"I feel now, today, just the way I felt that night, an hour before the fire! I feel now, this afternoon, that something awful is going to happen in this sound stage. Bill, should I say anything to the boss or the director — maybe get them not to shoot this scene today?"

The big man jerked his arm loose from the other's detaining hand. His phlegmatic face registered annoyance and contempt.

"Are you nuts? Sure, they'll put off shooting the scene for a day, with a forty-four thousand dollar payroll, just because you got a shivery feeling in your spine. I can just see them doing a thing like that!"

"But, Bill . . ." quavered the smaller man.

"You better get busy," said the other, briefly. "Come on, hop to it."

The two left the baby spot the smaller man had adjusted to illumine Miss Harwell's bronze, silky hair. The big man was scowling, and a

sneer shaped his lips. But the smaller man looked almost ill, and his eyes glinted like the eyes of a frightened horse in the dimness.

Neither of the two noticed something it was, in a way, their business to see:

Taped inconspicuously to the power cable trailing from the spot that was to throw its rays on Miss Harwell's head was a fine bare wire. It entered the shell of the light along with the big cable. It was soldered, with the other, to the incandescent globe socket. And before this globe there was a lens that differed just a little in color from the glass of the other lenses.

A trifling difference. One any man could be forgiven for not seeing.

A tall man with stoop shoulders adjusted a microphone at the end of a long boom. He stepped front of it, called: "One, three, five, six, seven . . ."

The voice of the monitor in the glass-enclosed booth came hollowly from a loud-speaker, like the voice of a ghost: "Okay on valve test."

Through the great outer doors came the director and the members of the cast who were to participate in the scene, two men who played minor roles, and Miss Harwell.

It is unnecessary to describe the great Joan Harwell. Before her untimely end, she was familiar to two-thirds of the population of the country. Her silky, red-brown hair had dazzled millions of eyes with its soft sheen. Her large, brilliant eyes were the envy of the women of a nation. Her body, flawless in the delicate maturity of its curves, had stirred the pulses of a nation's men. A great beauty, she would have been outstanding in any period; one of those women who almost frighten the beholder by their perfection.

She was dressed in a creamy satin negligee which was to register white on the film. The negligee clung to her figure, accentuating its loveliness, and revealed perfect bare arms and throat. Above it her exquisite face and flame-brown hair were flower-like.

"Miss Harwell," said the director, a corpulent man with a bald head, "you know your lines?"

"Yes," she said, in the soft, well-modulated tone with which all the theater-goers in the world were familiar.

"We'll rehearse this living-room scene, then . . . What is it? Don't you feel well?"

The director looked anxiously at the star's rather pale face, spotting the pallor in spite of her exaggerated make-up.

Joan Harwell hesitated a moment, with her red lips quivering. Then she smiled. "I feel all right."

"You're sure? We've been working you pretty hard lately."

"I'm sure." The beautiful face continued in its smile, although the deep violet eyes were not smiling. "I felt a little cold for a moment, that's all. Not exactly cold—a little chilled, as though a cold, damp wind had touched me."

"I don't think there's any draft in here," said the director jovially, glancing at the solid walls. "Well, let's get on with it. I'll run over the scene again for you."

"You are to sit on that divan in the center of the set. You are to register happiness mixed with fear. The man you love is on his way to see you—but another man may reach him before he gets here with a malicious tale that may turn him against you. So you are in a fever of impatience, mad to hold him in your arms, ecstatic at one moment and at the next fearful that he may not come at all. Then the malicious tale-bearer comes in and announces that your lover is on his way back to the ship that will carry him out of your life for ever. You have lost. You go through the throes of grief and rage . . . But I think you know the rest well enough. Take your place, please."

Miss Harwell walked to the divan and sat down. Light in floods brought every detail of her face and form into relief as she reclined on the divan. She faced a little away from the bank of cameras.

"You're sure you feel all right?" persisted the director, staring at her violet eyes.

"Yes. I'm all right."

The director bit his lips, then shrugged. After all, this was only a rehearsal. The star's slightly strained look, for which he could think of no reason whatever, would not matter.

"More light on Miss Harwell's right cheek," he called.

The burly electrician moved a baby spot. The planes of the star's face leaped into higher relief.

"On the back of her head," said the director.

The man with the sensitive face and the wide, apprehensive eyes moved another small spot so that Miss Harwell's lustrous hair became a web of silky light.

And Joan Harwell shivered suddenly as that light touched her.

All noticed it, though none noticed that the last small spot to be moved was the one that had the fine bare wire subtly fastened to its power cable.

"Is the lens of that light clean?" snapped the director. "It seems just

a shade off-color . . . No, I guess my eyes are playing me tricks. All right, Miss Harwell."

Absolute silence reigned in the great sound stage. In it, workmen and actors, property man and director, stared at the nation's most beautiful woman who sat on the divan in the lacy negligee that molded limbs and body a sculptor could not have equaled.

The star swung into her part.

"He's coming," she whispered, just audibly for the microphone to catch it. "He'll be here soon . . . after nearly a year. . . ."

The director frowned. Her voice was strained, almost harsh. But her facial expression was all right. It registered happiness—mixed with fear. No, not fear. Horror! What ailed the girl?

The spotlights rayed on her face and body. The little spot that illuminated her hair seemed to burn with a faintly orange tint. . . .

The director, seated in his camp chair, gripped the rough wooden arms and stared with eyes that protruded from their sockets.

Joan Harwell's hair! What in heaven's name? . . .

It seemed to be fading from her head like a cobweb mist, revealing the lines of her skull!

The director blinked rapidly, and stared again. Was he going mad? The slight rasp of his panting shivered in the air. He was going insane—or blind!

"He'll be here soon," Miss Harwell whispered, "unless Tim reaches him first . . ."

A sort of croak came from the director's throat, a rasping small sound of utter horror.

The beautiful lips that had murmured the words had become like the lustrous hair—misty, like substance of fog rather than of flesh. He could see her teeth through the lips!

The shivering sob of the small electrician near him in a way reassured the director, though the reassurance was a dreadful thing. For it told him that someone else was seeing what he saw.

"If Tim tells me that lie, and kills his love for me!" breathed the star. "But he won't! Fate couldn't be so unkind."

And now in the sound stage there was a paralysis of silence more terrible than wild shouts. Every eye was riveted on the star with chains of horror. Riveted on her face and head.

Something was happening to the beautiful face—something terrible and impossible beyond description—something of which Joan Harwell

still seemed unaware, though the tone of her voice had grown more strained and odd with each word she uttered.

Her face was disappearing!

Shuddering, whimpering silently in his throat, gripping the arms of his chair, the director glared at the girl on the divan. And now the metamorphosis, progressing ever more swiftly, was complete. And Joan Harwell no longer had a countenance that could move men to rapture and women to envy.

Gone were the violet eyes and the straight small nose. Gone the silky hair and the creamy skin of cheeks and brow.

On the star's lovely throat a skull rested!

With a scream the director leaped from his chair. And his wild shriek broke the awful silence that chained the others in the sound stage. As one, they ran for the great outer doors, hiding their eyes from the thing of horror that now sat on the divan; all but the burly electrician, who stood near the cameras and stared, with eyes that started from his head, at the thing that had been a woman.

A gorgeous body, seductively revealed by a cream satin negligee—but a body on which was nothing but a grinning skull!

"My God!" whimpered the one man who had stayed behind. "Oh, my God!"

"Harry!" shrilled Joan Harwell, getting up from the divan and turning toward the doors from which the men were hastening. "Harry—what is it? What has happened to me?"

The director did not answer. He did not turn back to look at her. Not for empires would he have gazed again at what had been sheer beauty. He ran from the doors and out into the afternoon sun. The star was alone with the shaking big man in coveralls who stared at her with twitching terror in his stupid face.

The thing that had been Joan Harwell walked toward the man. The negligee, trailing from the perfect body, rustled in the stillness. The blanched white skull on the slender, lovely throat turned toward him.

"You," Joan Harwell's voice came from between teeth that chattered in their bony sockets, "for the love of heaven—tell me! What has happened?"

The man's nerve broke utterly at last. With a hoarse yell he turned from the glaring, hollow eye-sockets of the skull, and raced for the door to join the others.

The beautiful form in the clinging negligee stood beside the cameras. The ghastly skull turned this way and that.

"Gone! All of them! They ran from me. But what has *happened* to me?"

The lovely figure swayed. Then it walked unsteadily to a make-up box near the set, with the skull atop the creamy bare shoulders shining almost phosphorescently in the dimness. Death on lovely life! A pallid skull on a beautiful woman's body!

The thing that had been Joan Harwell stretched out a trembling arm and hand toward the make-up. Pink, tapering fingers opened it. In the lifted lid a mirror showed.

For perhaps ten seconds of frozen silence the glaring eye-sockets of the skull stared into the reflection of themselves. Then through the clenched and naked teeth scream on scream ripped forth.

People gathering outside the sound stage, drawn by the almost crazed director and workmen, heard those screams and shuddered. But none moved to enter the place. None dared!

And suddenly the frightful screams ceased. The pink fingers holding the lid of the make-up box slammed it down, shattering the mirror into a thousand pieces. In its place the fingers caught up a pair of shears, keen, thin, long.

Straight and tall the figure stood—lovely as few women's bodies are lovely. Then a bare white arm went up. The shears glittered in the dimness of the sound stage; glittered more as they swept down and in; ceased glittering as they were bedded in flesh.

Joan Harwell fell, the negligee half covering a breast from which crimson poured, but with nothing covering the thing of horror that had been a flawless countenance crowned by bronze hair.

And now in a far corner of the great stage a shadow moved. It had seemed nothing but a mound of debris covered with tarpaulin. But now it took on human shape.

A tall, emaciated-looking figure stood erect. A black cloak covered it from heels to head. A dark felt hat with a down-drooping brim hid the head and part of the face. The rest of the face was covered by a red fabric mask.

The figure walked to the body of the dead star, and stared down. From eye-holes in the red mask, black eyes gazed callously at the skull set on the creamy throat. Then the felt hat moved as the man nodded.

Silently the figure moved from the body to the small spot that had been trained on Joan Harwell's head. Fingers sheathed in red rubber gloves ripped the bare fine wire loose from the power cable. Then the figure moved toward a smaller door in the sound stage leading into

the property warehouse—where a secret exit could be made with the fine wire which was all the clue that might have explained the method by which a flawless face had been turned to fleshless ruin.

2

IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM flanking the private office of the president of the R-G-R Motion Picture Company, eight men sat. They were the wealthiest men of the industry, titans of the picture business. But they looked like anything but titans as they sat there.

The eight were frightened to the verge of collapse, and they showed it. Their faces, whether lean or chubby, were paper-white. Their hands trembled. Several smoked, sucked in great drafts from cigar or cigarette and expelling them again without really knowing what they were doing. And the eyes of all were turned toward the door marked: *A. R. Stang, President.*

In the big private office behind the closed door, there was a sight to evoke the same dread as that inspired the day before in the sound stage when Joan Harwell gazed into a mirror and saw why men ran from her.

Stang, the president, shivered in a huge leather chair next to the big desk across which normally flowed the business of R-G-R. But no business was flowing now. The desk was bare. And beside it, a fantastic creature, cowered Stang. Or the thing Stang had become!

The president's corpulent body remained untouched. But his left forearm and hand were the hand and forearm of a skeleton! Like bony twigs his fingers writhed and clenched while he sat there gazing at them; gazing out of sockets as eyeless as Joan Harwell's had been yesterday! For on the thick neck of the man was no longer placed a head. A skull was there, blanched, pallid, naked bone.

No sound came from the fleshless mouth. Sounds had been worn out. For eighteen hours Stang had cowered in the office, unable to drag himself out of it to face the horrified stares of the rest of the world. For eighteen hours he had screamed and cursed, raving for those who knocked at the office door to go away.

Now the first person to come into the big room was pacing up and down before him and shaking his head while he said with stiff lips: "I don't know what to do. I've been a practising physician for twenty-

eight years, and I've never seen anything like it. You haven't any idea what caused the change?"

The skull on Stang's shoulder spoke.

"I have no idea at all. I was sitting at my desk, bent over. I was writing. Just a check, so I didn't bother to light my desk lamp—I sat with only the light from the overhead fixture shining down on my head and hand. Maybe that light . . . but how could a light do—*this*—to me?"

He raised his skeletal left hand and forearm. The doctor's nails bit into his palms as he repressed a shudder.

"I didn't feel anything much. I recall feeling cold, as if a dank wind had touched me. That was all. The first thing that told me of the change was my secretary's behavior. She came into the office, stared at me as though she'd suddenly been turned to stone, and fainted. And I've been in here ever since . . . Doctor, for God's sake, do something!"

The doctor walked toward the door.

"I'll do everything humanly possible. But first I've got to try to find out what is wrong. I'll take this sample of your flesh down to the laboratory and report back as soon as I can."

He opened the office door, with a reflection in his eyes of the panic that had filled the eyes of those who had fled from Joan Harwell, and went into the conference room.

The eight executives in there surrounded him.

"Doctor—what causes it?"

"Is it some new disease? Is it contagious?"

"Is it controllable?" rasped one who held crumpled in his fist a sheet of notepaper.

The doctor brushed them aside with a weary wave of his hand. "Gentlemen, I know nothing yet. I can only tell you what I told Mr. Stang. As soon as I find out something I'll report."

"But what could strip the flesh off a human being's bones like that?" demanded a short fat man whose high voice was like a squeal. "And how can a person live in such a condition?"

"The flesh is not stripped off," said the doctor, moistening his lips. "That at least I have found out. I found it out by feeling of the affected parts. The flesh is still there, gentlemen. Mr. Stang's head is not a naked skull. Hair and flesh and eyes and features are still there. But in some unguessable way they have been made invisible, or transparent. The flesh is as it always was—but it is as translucent as so much spring

water, so that all you can see is the bony structure underneath. Similarly with his left hand. So it is not as bad as we feared."

"Not as bad!" squealed the fat man. "Does it make it any the less frightful that the skull is not really a naked skull? To the eyes of all beholders, it is only dead bone!"

"An illusion," the doctor began shakily.

"Hell, man! In a case like this illusion is as ghastly as reality. Stang can never mingle in the world again, like that. At a stroke he has been made into a thing that is dead even though still alive. You've got to do something!"

The doctor shrugged, opened his lips as though to retort, and then went on out of the conference room. Behind him, the eight reseated themselves at the big oval table.

"Gentlemen, we're beaten," said the man who held the sheet of note-paper in his hand. "We will have to follow the demands of this outrageous letter."

He straightened the crumpled paper and read again that message which any of the eight could have repeated word for word from having read it so many times already:

Bertrand C. Phillips, President of Acme Pictures, Incorporated: You will arrange to pay me five hundred thousand dollars by tomorrow at midnight. You will also instruct your star, Dorothy Dean, to pay to me the three hundred and eighty thousand dollars she has invested in Government bonds. If the payments are not made, she will suffer the fate of Joan Harwell, and you shall become as A. R. Stang—whom I advise you to visit immediately in company with other motion picture heads. His appearance may be an object lesson. Signed DOCTOR SATAN.

The man with the letter looked around the circle of faces.

"Bertrand Phillips," he said. "That's me. And if I don't pay, I'll have a skull for a head and enter into a life in death such as lies before Stang. If I do pay, and persuade Miss Dean to pay, it will be only a beginning of the schemes of this man who calls himself Doctor Satan. Every one of you will have to give in to the same threat in turn. And then all of us will have to keep on, paying millions to the fellow."

The little fat man shook his head like a scared, bewildered child. "But nobody can do a thing like that! Making flesh transparent over bone so that only the bone is seen, like a living skeleton! It can't be done."

"The only answer is that it *has* been done," the other man ground out. "I'm going to pay, personally. I'll pay Miss Dean's share too, if

she should refuse to do as Doctor Satan demands. Her head is worth more than three hundred and eighty thousand dollars to me. Not to mention my own!"

"Is there no way out, then?"

"None, gentlemen, as far as I can see. A man who could perform such miracles of horror as were performed on Stang and Joan Harwell is a man far beyond the reach of law or the police." He sagged lower in his chair. "I repeat, we're beaten—"

The outer door of the conference room opened. A man stood on the threshold an instant, then calmly came into the room. He was tall, dressed in dark gray that masked the width of his shoulders and the muscularity of his athletic frame. Steely gray eyes peered out from under black eyebrows. The eyes, combined with a large but aristocratic-looking nose, gave him a hawk-like appearance.

"Who are you?" squalled the little fat man in feeble wrath. His fear and uncertainty in the last hours came out in a burst of rage against the intrusion. "What are you doing in this room? We left orders that no one was to come in here!"

The man's large, firm mouth moved in a grim smile.

"Your orders were observed by your office help," he said. "Or, they would have been observed—but I walked past them out there and came in anyway."

"Who are you, anyhow?"

"My name," said the man, "is Ascott Keane—"

"Keane? Keane! That means nothing to me. I never heard of you—"

"Just a minute," the voice of the man with the letter cut across the little fat man's voice. "That name means something to *me*! Ascott Keane . . . Aren't you a criminologist? From New York?"

Keane nodded.

"You're a sort of undercover man, working for no one but yourself? You tackle the big crime cases, sometimes when the regular police don't even know the cases exist?"

Again Keane nodded.

"For God's sake," quavered Phillips, "sit down and talk this over with us. I don't know if you realize it, but a man like you couldn't have come here at a better time!"

Ascott Keane looked at the letter Phillips handed him. He didn't even bother to read it. The signature, Doctor Satan, was all he needed to see.

His steel-gray eyes turned toward Phillips. "I didn't come here by any accident," he said quietly. "I came knowing I would find some

such thing as this in Hollywood. I saw the news flashes yesterday about the hideous thing that had happened to Miss Harwell. Within a half-hour I was on a plane, with my secretary, Beatrice Dale, headed this way. At the airport when I landed I overheard a man talking of what had happened to Stang here. The man was on his way out of California, afraid it might happen to him too. So I came here at once, to place my services at your disposal."

"If you will," babbled the little fat man, "if you only will—well, you can name your own fee."

Keane's grim smile appeared again.

"I happen to be fairly wealthy, gentlemen. I am not working against Doctor Satan for fees. I'm working"—his eyes flamed—"to rid the world of a monster that will be emperor of all crime if he can't be destroyed!"

Phillips clutched his trembling hands together. "A man who can do what he has done," he said, "could be emperor of the world, I'd think. Who is he, Mr. Keane? You seem to know of him already."

"I know very little. I don't know his identity, nor does anyone else. But I do know that his is a name that is internationally famous for family wealth and power. I know that he is a man in the prime of life, who has become jaded with the pleasures of wealth and has turned to crime of a sort so advanced and bizarre that nothing like it has ever been known before—crime, incidentally, that must pay, in the end. That is one of the rules of his game. Though he is perhaps richer than any of you here, he must get money from his crimes or they would not be successful and he would not get his thrill from his grim play."

The little fat man clutched his arm. "You can stop him, can't you?" he squealed. "You can force him to leave Hollywood? Money! Successful crime! He'll get all the wealth of all us us if he can't be stopped."

"I can do my best," murmured Keane. "Can any of you men give me a hint or clue of how the change was wrought in Stang or Joan Harwell?"

The eight looked at each other. Finally Phillips said: "I don't think any of us can give you a bit of help. I doubt if Stang himself can." His voice sank to a fearful whisper. "I wonder where Doctor Satan is, here in Hollywood. And I wonder if he has prepared my fate, and that of Dorothy Dean, already."

If you missed the first two stories in this series, you will find them in the Fall 1966 (#2) and Winter 1967/68 (#7) issues of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. Order from page 128.

3.

The motion picture industry was still a new one; and R-G-R was not a pioneer company. None of its buildings was very old. But one of them, the property warehouse, was old enough so that all but a few veteran workmen had forgotten one feature of its construction.

Under the north end of the warehouse was a deep circular pit. At one time the mechanism for a large, buried, movable stage had been in that pit; a stage set beside the original, smaller warehouse. Then the stage had been discarded, the warehouse had needed enlarging, and workmen had floored the unused pit and built the warehouse out over it.

Dark, secret, forgotten, it had yawned beneath the cement floor untouched for years. But it was untouched and forgotten no longer.

Less than four hundred yards from the conference room in which eight executives sat in pallid fear, the pit teemed now with activity.

In the center was a big electric motor, once the power source of the movable stage mechanism; then left to rust, out-moded; now cleaned and repaired again. It was running, sending out a low hum that filled the round pit with a murmuring noise.

Beside it were three men—one normal and average, the other two like gargoyles out of a nightmare.

The one was a workman in coveralls with rubber-insulated pliers in his hand. He shrank from the other two as he stood there. And no wonder.

One of these two was a giant of a man with no legs, who moved about between his swinging arms with an astonishing speed and agility. The other was a small fellow with matted hair over his face through which pale, cruel eyes peered like those of a sadistic monkey. The legless giant was Bostiff, servant of Doctor Satan. The smaller man was Girse, another henchman.

"I tell you this old motor won't hold together much longer," chattered the man in coveralls. "I didn't think I'd ever get it in working order in the first place."

"You got it in working order," rumbled Bostiff, "because you'd have been killed if you hadn't. You'll keep it in working order for the same reason."

"What are you using it for, anyhow?" babbled the workman. "And how long are you going to hold me here?"

A sinister smile appeared on Bostiff's stupid, savage face. "We'll hold you here as long as we need an electrician," he growled. "As for what the motor is used for—it's to make things happen to women like Joan Harwell and men like that damn rich man, Stang!"

"But how in the name of—"

"Shut up," snapped Bostiff, cracking the flat of his huge hand against the electrician's mouth.

The electrician staggered back, with blood flowing from his lips. And as he did so, a red light near the roughly cut entrance of the circular pit snapped on and off.

"It's *him*!" said Girse, hopping monkey-like toward the entrance.

Bostiff drew his gigantic body up on the backs of his hands as though standing to attention. Girse opened the door.

A figure came through that was as bizarre and extraordinary as something cut from a book of ancient illustrations; a figure that looked as though made up for the part of Lucifer in some ghastly masquerade.

A red robe sheathed its gauntness as a red scabbard might sheathe a lean blade. Red rubber gloves covered the hands; a red mask concealed the face save for burning black eyes; over the hair was a red skull-cap with two small knobs like sardonic devil's horns.

"Doctor Satan," murmured Bostiff hoarsely.

The electrician whimpered and drew back from the sinister form in red. Doctor Satan's jet-black eyes flicked over the unfortunate man, noting the blood oozing from his cut lips. "He has been trying to get away?" he asked Bostiff.

The legless giant shook his head. "Not that. Feared he could not keep this old equipment running."

The red mask over Doctor Satan's face moved a bit, as though to a smile. "He will keep it running," came the voice. "He loves life." Doctor Satan turned toward Girse. The little man's pale eyes wavered under the impact of the coal-black ones glaring from the eye-holes in the mask.

"Girse, there is more for you to do. Take the fine wire and run it from this pit to the R-G-R conference room. Attach it there to the light socket over the third chair on the left-hand side of the big table. The third chair, Girse! Make no mistake! It is in that chair that Bertrand Phillips sits."

A chuckle came from the masked lips. "Because that light gives diffused illumination instead of a beam of it like a spotlight, we shall be unable to control the rays quite so thoroughly. It will be amusing to

see the result—if Phillips defies me. He might become a partial skeleton from the waist up, instead of merely exchanging a normal head for a skull."

"The wire is to be laid from this pit to the third light on the left side of the conference table," muttered Girse, parrot-like. "It shall be done, Master. And it is to be attached at this end?"

"To the transformer," nodded Doctor Satan. He paused an instant, then said gently, "This man has not been allowed to examine that transformer?"

Bostiff stared with dull ferocity at the electrician. "He has not."

Doctor Satan walked to one wall of the pit, near the humming old motor. A cable led from the motor to a black box leaning against this wall. Doctor Satan raised the lid of the box. Over his red-robed shoulder could have been observed a maze of cobweb wires in the box, with vacuum tubes studding the maze and glass terminals at the wire's ends. From the opposite end of the box came a small length of the fine wire that had led to the baby spot in the sound stage. To this would be spliced the wire leading to the conference room.

Doctor Satan's Luciferian head moved in a gesture of satisfaction. "All is ready. Prepare the wiring, Girse. And—if by the luck of the devil, my master, you should see Ascott Keane, you know what to do. If you can!"

Bostiff started. His dull eyes swung toward the red mask. "Keane?" he croaked.

"Yes. He is here. In Hollywood. He is to be killed at sight."

The eight men who headed the motion picture industry of the nation were in the R-G-R conference room at eleven-fifty next night. They faced Ascott Keane, who sat at the head of the board.

Bertrand Phillips' face was dewed with sweat. He kept staring at the clock, and running his tongue over his dry lips.

"In ten minutes," he said huskily, "if the payment is not made I am to become as Stang became! Keane, I must make that payment!"

Keane shook his head. His face was pale, tense. "Payment would only put off your fate. You would pay—and pay again. There would come a time when you could pay no longer, and then Doctor Satan would strike. For he must keep terror alive in the hearts of others, and to do that he must give a horrible object lesson at regular intervals."

"But what can we do? You have found out nothing. You admit it."

"No, I have not admitted it. I have found out a little. I have found

out how Doctor Satan creates his ghastly illusion, for one thing. The man has devised a ray that changes the molecular arrangement of flesh. The ray, playing on flesh, so lines up the atoms of which that flesh is composed, that they fade from the range of vision of the average eye. It is as if a cloud of dust particles were so shaken as to line the particles up one behind the other. The cloud would become a thing of straight lines, seen end on, and hence not seen at all."

"But how is the ray controlled? From what place can it come?"

"I don't know," said Keane.

"And where does this Doctor Satan hide? Such a ray would mean equipment of some sort. Perhaps bulky equipment. Where is it concealed?"

"I don't know."

Phillips sprang from the chair he habitually used and paced up and down the room, with the eyes of the others following him.

"I can't stand the strain any longer! I want to pay!" He mopped at his forehead. "Fancy going through the rest of my life as Stang is doomed to do! Unless he kills himself. . . "

He stopped abruptly, and a look of terror froze his face. "Do you hear it?" he whispered, after a moment.

Ascott Keane stared at him. "Hear what?"

"A voice." His whisper shivered in the conference room. "A voice! I heard it distinctly. It said: 'Remember—at midnight! Pay, or doom overtakes you at midnight!'"

Frozen silence chained the room for an instant. Then the eyes of all swung back to Keane.

"Telepathy," said Keane quietly. "There was no voice. The words grew in your brain, Phillips. But I think it means that Doctor Satan is very near us."

"I'm afraid!" panted Phillips. "Keane—what are you going to do?"

"I've told you. We will wait here till midnight. Satan will strike then, or attempt to. And the nature of the attack—and its source—will determine my next move."

"But he strikes at me!" sobbed Phillips. "At *me*! If you can't act quickly enough. . . "

He stopped and stared at the clock. Two minutes of twelve. With a groan he sank into his chair again and buried his face in his hands.

Keane stared at him with pity in his steely eyes, though inexorable

purpose shaped his countenance. Then his eyes, too, sought the clock. A minute and a half to twelve. A minute . . .

How did Doctor Satan project his diabolical ray? How could he control the invisible current that made flesh transparent so that the bony structure beneath, whose mineral content no doubt made it impervious to the ray, could be made so hideously plain?

Forty seconds to twelve o'clock.

Phillips' breathing rasped through the silence. The littlefat man choked out a curse. The rest of the picture executives held their breaths.

Thirty seconds. There was a slight flicker of the lights . . .

"Out of that chair!" yelled Ascott Keane, springing up so swiftly that his own chair was overturned. "That's how he does it! The lights! *Out of that chair!*"

Phillips stared at him in dazed lack of comprehension, with a kind of bleating noise coming from his lips, Keane bounded toward him.

"*Move, man!* Damn it—then—"

Keane's arm shot out. His hand clutched Phillips' coat collar and he pulled backward with all his strength. Phillips shot back against the wall, crying aloud, and Keane, with a leap and a smash of his hand, broke the light bulb in the ceiling over the spot where the man had been sitting.

Then, in the pandemonium of men unused to action and made into terrified animals by the nearness of peril, Keane looked grimly at his hand.

The fingers of that hand looked as if they had suddenly been turned to frosted glass. They were not quite opaque. In them could faintly be seen the outline of finger and knuckle bones. Doctor Satan's ray had accomplished a fraction of its deadly purpose before the bulb had been smashed.

"*Touche,*" he whispered. "A slight, partial victory for you, Doctor Satan. But also, I think, the beginning of the end."

He stared at the light socket.

"Of course! It came from the lights! I should have thought of it instantly. Joan Harwell's flesh became invisible when the spotlights were played on her. Stang's head changed under the ceiling light above his desk. The lights! With Satan's ray traveling along their beams!" He placed a chair beneath the shattered fixture, and examined it closely.

A fine bare wire came into view, soldered deftly to the socket, and threading up through the plaster of the ceiling with the main light wire. Disregarding the men who babbled and clutched at his arm, and who

stared with horrified eyes at the milky fingers of his right hand, he walked to the window and leaned out.

The rays of a small flashlight showed him more of the fine wire stretched unobtrusively down the outside wall of the building. Down the wall, to the ground. And at the other end of that wire . . .

"Gentlemen," Keane's vibrant voice cut across the din, "I shall see you soon. And I think I will have conclusive news!"

He went down and out of the building, and around beneath the window. Off into the night the fine wire ran, so inconspicuously that it would never have been seen by eyes not searching specially for it.

Off into the night—toward the great dark building which was R-G-R's property warehouse!

Drawing a deep breath, Keane started tracing the wire—to the source of the ray and, he prayed, the man who had devised it.



IN THE PIT BENEATH the property warehouse, Doctor Satan stood with his head bowed a little as though listening. He stood near the secret door, with Girse and Bostiff near him.

Behind the big electric motor, the electrician lay with eyes closed as though asleep. But under the fringe of his lashes he was watching the three near the door. And now and then, at long intervals, he moved a little. His movements was always in one direction—toward the mysterious black box to which a cable ran from the motor and from which a fine bare wire trailed on the opposite end from the cable.

Girse and Bostiff hardly breathed as they watched their master. The red-masked face lowered a bit more. They stared in silent respect, careful not to distract him.

They knew what Doctor Satan was doing. They had seen him do it often before.

Somewhere in the night outside, there was a person in whom Doctor Satan was vitally interested. He was reading that person's mind, through his marvelously advanced telepathic powers.

Suddenly the red-robed form stiffened. The red mask moved with words.

"Phillips will pay," the quiet voice stated. "He has escaped the doom of the ray. Someone suspected the source, and broke the light bulb. Ascott Keane, probably." The red-gloved hands clenched. "But Phillips will pay. He has just telephoned his home to deliver to whatever mes-

senger calls for it the package of currency he made up before Keane persuaded him to hold off. Girse, you will call for that package. First, as you go out, remove the wire from this pit to the conference room before it is traced. Then go to Phillips' home."

A malevolent chuckle sounded from the covered lips. "Half a million dollars! And it is only a beginning—"

The words stopped with awful suddenness, and coal-black eyes glaring from the mask's eye-holes began to gleam like fire opals.

Doctor Satan turned suddenly, and stared at the black box from which the fine wire ran. He stared also at the figure beside it.

The electrician had edged his way from the motor to the box. Leaning on one elbow, with his terrified gaze going constantly to the ominous red form by the door, he had raised the lid, and was peering in at the maze of wires and tubes the box housed.

The man cried out, a low, choked exclamation. There was no chance for him to pretend sleep as he had done before. Satan had whirled and caught him as though he'd had eyes in the back of his head and had watched all along.

No chance to conceal his fatal curiosity! The man could only stare, panting, into the awful black eyes, with his hand still holding open the lid of the box.

Doctor Satan walked slowly toward him. On either side, Girse and Bostiff moved with him. The terrible three advanced soundlessly, save for the slight rasp of Bostiff's calloused knuckles on the floor as he propelled his great body forward.

The man screamed, and cowered away from the box. He got to his feet, wildly, and tried to run. But there was no place to run to.

Girse got him on one side, and Bostiff on the other. They dragged him to confront Doctor Satan. The eyes behind the eye-holes in the mask were like small black windows into hell.

"So," murmured Doctor Satan, "you were curious to see what was in the box."

His red-sheathed arms folded themselves across his chest. His voice was as soft as satin—and as deadly as a snake's hiss.

"Scientific curiosity," he purred. "The inquisitiveness of the trained man. It is an odd thing. You are a prisoner here, afraid for your life—and rightly. But in the same room with you there is a bit of electrical equipment such as you have never seen before. Mysterious equipment. A new invention. And you must look. With death staring you in the face,

you can still be moved by that professional inquisitiveness! The human animal is an odd object."

The man held by Girse and Bostiff said nothing. It was doubtful if he heard the words, or, hearing, understood them. He stood there, half fainting in the grasp of the sinister two, staring at the death in the coal-black eyes.

"So you would have read the secret of my ray," the calm voice went on, "and perhaps have exploited it for your own profit when you got out of here! Fool, you will never leave here, I could not have let you live, in any case, to bear witness as to what happened here. Now I am doubly forced to remove you."

The red-clad form seemed to grow, to tower taller in the low, cement-covered pit. "Girse! Bostiff! Stand aside!"

The two released the man and moved away from him. The electrician sank to his knees, unable to support his weight on his trembling legs.

"I saw nothing!" he chattered. "I learned nothing! I swear—"

He stopped. His lips continued to move for a moment, but no more words came. His eyes were like those of a bird paralyzed by a serpent as he kneeled there.

"You wanted the secret of the box?" purred Doctor Satan. "Well, you shall have it. But it will be a different secret from the one you already have an inkling of. That transformer of mine has two functions. The primary ray it can produce re-aligned molecules to make them invisible. The secondary ray causes atoms to collapse."

The coal-black eyes beneath the mask burned more fiercely yet.

"Have you ever speculated on what would happen if atoms collapsed? Matter is nothing but a few atoms moving within certain confines. The rest is space. Your body, for example, is not a solid at all, really. It would be interesting to see what would happen if the atoms of your body were compacted to their limits."

Gasping, the man stared at him. Doctor Satan moved to the box, with his eyes constantly impaling his victim. He reached within. A tiny light glowed in the side of the box. Doctor Satan trained its rays on the electrician.

The man began to scream. The agony of hell was in those screams. But he did not move. His body twitched and jerked, but seemed incapable of muscular action.

On and on the screams continued, but gradually they changed tone. They grew higher, shriller in pitch, keeping time in their change of pitch with a phenomenal change in the man's body.

It was growing steadily smaller!

With poorly concealed terror in their eyes, Girse and Bostiff watched the fate of Doctor Satan's latest victim. They watched him shrivel from a man to a figure the size of a child. It was like peering down a telescope so adjusted as to reduce an adult form to a statuette the size of a doll.

On and on the unfortunate man screamed. But now the screams were like the shrilling of an insect, piercing the ear-drums in the upper reaches of sound, but still scarcely audible.

"My God!" whispered Bostiff at last.

The man was a thing two inches high, that peered up and up at the towering giants in the mile-high room. Girse and Bostiff bent far down to see, keeping carefully out of the ray's beam. And they saw that the feebly shrilling, tiny thing that had been a human being was sinking into the packed earth that made the floor of the pit.

"Small as he is," the voice of Doctor Satan whispered, "he weighs as much as ever. And a thing two inches tall and weighing a hundred and sixty or seventy pounds will sink through pretty solid substance."

Now the ear could no longer hear the tiny shrilling of the man's screams. And the eye could no longer see him save as a blot, a pinpoint. The pinpoint remained the same in size . . .

Doctor Satan turned off the deadly little light. Girse and Bostiff bent till their eyes were within six inches of the pinpoint . . .

It was a hole in the hard-packed earth. A hole that might have been made by a fine needle. Down that hole the man had sunk. To where? God knew! Such concentrated weight might stop with the first rock layer of the earth's crust—or it might sink and sink till earth's center was reached! Either way, a slight threat to Doctor Satan's peace of mind had been removed.

The pit was very quiet as, sweating, Bostiff looked up at Doctor Satan again. The red-robed figure was moving convulsively. And with horror in even his savage heart, Bostiff read the meaning of the movement. Doctor Satan was laughing!

"At least he will see things, if he lives, that no human eyes have ever seen before—" Doctor Satan began.

But the sentence was never finished.

Another voice rang out in the pit, the voice of neither Girse nor Bostiff nor their hellish master. "Perhaps he will sink far enough to pay his respects to the demon you emulate, if there is a devil and a deep-buried hell."

A monkey-like cry came from Girse's lips, and a rasping exclamation from the thick lips of Bostiff. Doctor Satan whirled toward the door with his hands clenched so hard over the rim of the black box that it seemed as if the red gloves must split.

"Ascott Keane! By heaven—"

Keane walked slowly forward from the door to which he had trailed the wire. He was empty-handed. He needed no weapons for defense from such as Bostiff and Girse; and he knew that no ordinary weapons could injure Doctor Satan. But it was eerie to see him walk, without apparent defense, into the lair of the cold-blooded monster in red.

"You trailed the wire," breathed Doctor Satan. "You found me—and you came alone. It is more than I could have hoped for."

Suddenly his body moved convulsively again. And Bostiff and Girse saw that again he was laughing, but with a laughter now more terrible than that with which he had watched the disappearance of the electrician.

"More than I could have hoped for, Ascott Keane. You came—but you shall not leave as you entered!"

"That's what you said when I found you beneath the graveyard in New York," said Keane. "But I left—and you very nearly stayed behind, dead!"

Doctor Satan's laughter stopped. His eyes glowed with cold triumph. "That time I did not have the black box. This time I have. *And you shall receive its emanations as the other did!*"

With the words his red-gloved hand flashed down. The tiny light glowed again—with its rays leveled straight at Keane.

Keane shouted once, a yell of agony, then was silent. But he was not silent because the agony had ceased. The torture of that beam of light was a thing that tripled by the second, a thing that knocked the breath from his body and seemed to sear him in flame.

With legs wide apart, he stood there like a figure of stone, unable to move a muscle. And as he stood there, he became smaller.

From Doctor Satan's masked lips came a grating cry more eloquent of triumph than the waving pennants of a victorious army. "I've got you!"

Ascott Keane's once tall frame had dwindled till his head was almost on a level with the head of the legless Bostiff. And still he stood there, braced on widespread legs, glaring at the figure in red.

"Success, and your doom, Ascott Keane!"

Doctor Satan moved closer to his victim, along the side of the clear-

illustration by Vincent Napoli



cut path of the beam. He thrust his red-covered face down close to Keane's face, which was a mask of agony.

"*Watch out!*" screamed Girse.

But the words came too late. Already, Keane had moved. His right hand shot out and clutched Doctor Satan's red-robed shoulder. His left gripped the fabric of the robe at his throat.

Indescribable amazement and almost superstitious fear glinted in the black eyes of the man who had roused such awe and such superstitious fear in others.

"My God!" he gasped. "My God! You moved! But you can't move!

No one can move with the paralysis of the beam on him! It's . . . impossible . . . but you did . . . "

The hoarse, astounded words ended in a scream that was a faint echo of the shriek of the electrician. For Keane had pulled the red-cloaked figure before him so that the light from the black box caught it directly.

"See—how—you—like—it," whispered Keane, between gasps of agony.

Bostiff and Girse leaped forward. They clutched at Doctor Satan's robe and tried to tear him from Keane's grasp. But though his hands were so small that they looked like the hands of a child, they held their grip. His body was shrunken, but all its weight and all its muscle texture was left. He held the man with an unbreakable clutch.

"The light!" screamed Doctor Satan thinly. "Turn it—off!"

Both Girse and Bostiff leaped toward the black box, Girse bounded monkey-like over the earth floor. Bostiff swinging in great loops on his thick arms.

"Quick!"

Girse fumbled in the box and apparently found no switch, for the deadly light continued to shine, and the red-robed form continued to shrink in size. He looked at Bostiff.

The legless giant growled something impotently, and caught up a hammer. He raised it over the box.

"No, no!" Doctor Satan shrieked. "The ray must be reversed! Don't wreck the transformer!"

Bostiff dropped the hammer. Girse continued to fumble. The red-clad body was now less than four feet tall, scarcely an inch taller than Keane's grim, compacted frame.

"Behind the light!" choked Doctor Satan. "Girse—"

His cry stopped, as the light did. Girse had found the switch. Agony rolled from Keane. He could breathe again. But he kept his clutch on Doctor Satan.

Keane spoke, his voice piping because of his shortened vocal cords. But there was no lack of relentlessness in it. "Make me as I was before, or you die!"

"You can't kill me!" Doctor Satan, trying fruitlessly to break Keane's grip. "No man can kill me!"

"You thought it was impossible for any mortal to move while in the path of the atom-compacting beam," said Keane. "But I moved. You have occult as well as scientific methods of fighting—but so have I.

I've come to close grips with you at last. You'll go to the devil, your maker, at once, if you don't do as I say."

"Bostiff! Girse!" panted Doctor Satan.

The two swung in on Keane. But, with their arms reaching for him, they stopped. His steely eyes were drilling into theirs, now Bostiff's, now Girse's. Under that hypnotic gaze they seemed to congeal.

"The switch, Girse," snapped Keane, moving Doctor Satan as he spoke, till he was in the path of the light instead of the red-robed body. "Move it backward — and we'll see what happens."

"Girse — don't move!" panted Doctor Satan. "You hear me —"

Girse moved like a sleepwalker toward the box.

"Girse —" It was a cry of rage from the red-masked lips.

But the monkey-like man went on, with Keane's power in the ascendancy even over Satan's. His hand found the switch. The light in the box snapped on.

In no particular did the light seem to differ from that which had flashed like a baleful eye to collapse the atoms in a man's body and shrink him in stature. Yet, now, under what seemed the same beam, Keane's stature increased.

To five feet he grew, to six. His face was a stony mask of triumph — tempered by the fact that Doctor Satan grew as he did. The rays filtered through his body, apparently, to affect the red-robed body he had tried to block from the light.

"Enough," he snapped.

Moving mechanically, Girse turned the switch. Once more the light went out. And now Keane saw a curious thing. His half-transparent right hand, affected in the conference room, had become opaque again! In the beam, that had been altered back to normal along with his stature.

At every point in this encounter with Doctor Satan, he had won! Now he had only to destroy that black box by the wall, and then destroy its master . . .

With all the tiger strength in his big body, he thrust the red-robed figure suddenly from him and leaped toward the box. Doctor Satan staggered back against the wall. But his jet-black eyes suddenly flamed savage hope instead of impotent rage.

Keane did not see the change in expression. He was too intent on catching up the hammer Bostiff had dropped, too sure he had won completely.

He raised the hammer over the box, with Girse and Bostiff making no move to stop him. Doctor Satan's eyes flared like the live coals . . .

"And now, damn you, you're next!" grated Keane, bringing down the hammer on all the intricate and delicate apparatus in the box as if it were the red-covered skull he struck.

There was a soft explosion. Rays of blue flame leaped from the black box, bathing Keane in malevolent fire.

He choked, cried out, and staggered back. Still a third secret the box had yielded: almost certain destruction to him who wrecked it!

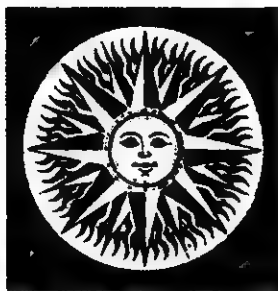
Doctor Satan stared at his two men, and, stirring as though waking from sleep, they moved toward him with Keane's occult chains broken. The blue flame licked at Keane's body.

"And so you die," came the voice of Doctor Satan, gentle now. "You have stopped me again. But this is the last time you'll interfere in my plans."

With Girse and Bostiff following him, Satan left the pit. And behind them, as the door closed, Ascott Keane lay with death playing through his body from the wrecked black box . . .

The hum of the motor beside him grew to a wail, a scream, and then with a grinding roar subsided into silence. With no constantly tending hand to keep it running, the motor had at last burned out.

But Doctor Satan did not know that; he was not, after all, infallible.



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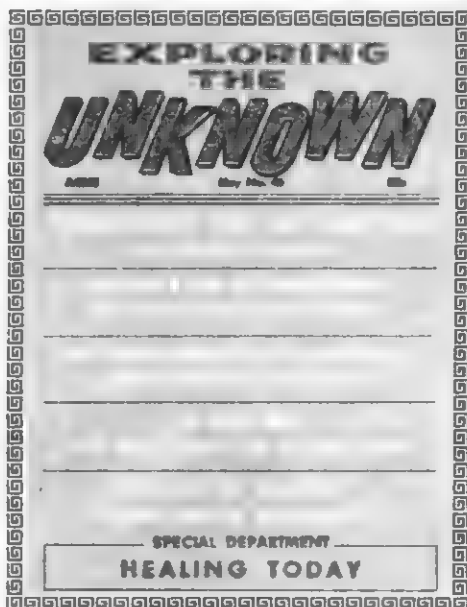
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the cauldron

Marvin Jones, of Los Angeles, asks an interesting question: "Would you, as an editor, sometime explain and discuss the almost universal device in weird stories of a framing story in which a character is depicted as narrating the main story to some group or to a second 'first person' who writes it down? I have read entire collections in which this device was used in each story, thus betraying its artificiality."

A number of conventions in English fiction spring from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the Puritan influence was on the upsurge, and for a time was the ruling influence in the land—under the Commonwealth. I do not mean to imply that these conventions were *invented* by the British reforming Puritans, for we can find them in use in earlier periods and in other lands as well; I do mean that they were then inculcated so deeply that traces of them in English speaking countries still remain—in the same particular form.

The two most important of these, it seems to me were (a) a suspicion of fiction as a fundamentally immoral and dishonest form of writing (b) the dictum that all writing should be for the purpose of edifying,

instructing, and uplifting the reader. (I think of Ray Cummings, back in 1942 speaking of the type of stories he wrote as being "sound moral instruction for young people". He was far from the only one of the old pulpeters of those days, and not only in fantasy and science fiction, who had the same idea.)

To get around the suspicion of fiction, authors of the Puritan times labelled their works "true histories" (*The True History of Robinson Crusoe*, etc.) and many such were at least inspired by true accounts or reports of actual experiences. Thus, Mr. DeFoe, was purportedly not creating a story but retelling one—"I know not what the truth may be, but here's the tale as 'twas told to me" was the slogan of the times. And when it came to tales particularly bizarre, "supernatural", etc., this device was considered proper in order to warn the reader that it wasn't necessarily true. But the author wasn't, of course (heavens, no! never such wickedness as that!) making it up; he was just indulging in harmless gossip for entertainment—and, of course, edification, instruction, uplift. The reader was supposed to be left convinced that his Sins Would Find Him Out and that Crime Does Not Pay and Virtue Is Always Rewarded—in

Heaven if not always on Earth, etc.

Artificial? Yes, indeed. Necessarily bad? No. It all depends upon how skillfully the particular author does it—and what seems skillful to me may not go down thus with you, and vice versa. All fiction is necessarily artifice; and I, for one, am not charmed with current trends to make fiction nearly indistinguishable from journalism in the name of "realism". I'm not interested in reading in a novel the same tiresome things, written in the same mindless manner, that I see in the papers every day, or hear yakked over the radio and TV. Not, that is, when such things constitute all of it; certainly there is no element of actuality that cannot, and is not, used creatively in fiction—and in fact this is what you will find, to a certain extent at least, in the best of the "classics" of English literature. (Bearing in mind that in many of these there were Things That A Lady or Gentleman Did Not Talk About.)

I agree that an entire anthology of "frame" stories shows questionable taste.

There are, as there always have been, fashions (or "waves") in the conventions of fiction; and the popular author, who has a fair notion of what the public wants, plays a game with his readers by now doing just what they expect and now doing something unexpected. (Actually, this is exactly what Mozart did in his piano concertos, all of which were written according to "formula"—but with such individual genius as almost to conceal the fact at times. And this is what the first rate artist does, or can do, in any period.) Another device that authors of fiction used to

evade puritanical censors was the pseudo-autobiography, or biography.

A. Conan Doyle used both the pseudo-autobiographical and the frame-story approach in *A Study in Scarlet*, wherein the world first met Sherlock Holmes. Doubtful whether the public (and editors are the author's first public) would go for a straight detective story, he has the murder mystery as a framework for a different short novel, *The Country of the Saints*. He does the same thing in *The Valley of Fear*, which is a frame for *The Scowrers*. In *The Sign of the Four*, the story-within-the-story is not set off, but nonetheless does take up a fair percentage of the novel; and only in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* do we have a full-length novel that is all the adventures of Holmes and Watson. Watson is, of course, Boswell writing of his own adventures with his friend, the Great Man; and only one of the Sherlock Holmes stories is written in the third person. (Some were written by Holmes himself, Watson not appearing in them.) That splendid expert upon the Sacred Writings, the late William Baring-Gould, is satisfied that Sherlock's brother, Mycroft, wrote the single third-person tale, *The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone*, while other Cardinals of the Conan suspect the hand of the (second? third) Mrs. John Watson.

So it may be that to say there are no bad devices in fiction, there are just clumsy authors, is to exaggerate; but I do not think that saying so gives a false impression.

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IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

*Jules de Grandin
solves the riddle of*

THE ISLE OF
MISSING SHIPS

ial," writes *David A. English*, whose short story, *The Cunning Of Private Rogoff*, appeared in the May (#21) issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*. "if recall when I first began to lift my eyes from the comics and read things with writing all the way through, this was a hotly-debated thing in the letter columns and fanzines. There were those who deemed the practice unfair to contemporary writers (did these fans not occasionally attack the typewriter with fictional intent? you may be sure they did) because it forestalled certain markets for them. As a writer this consideration weighs sadly upon me, for there are all too few markets for the type of story I best like to do. But as a reader I find that consideration overshadowed by my pleasure in getting my hands, more appropriately my eyeballs, on a goodly number of great stories that have been long been unavailable.

"This is particularly true when it comes to re-encountering dear old de Grandin, who has been a favorite of mine since reading *Lords of the Ghostlands*, in an issue of *WEIRD TALES* already old when I got it. I was a trifle disappointed to find him missing from the last *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. However, I can see how you might have felt that Dr. de Grandin's appearance would have resulted in a too-muchness of Frenchified devil-chaser for most readers (not for me!) and Mr.

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Did You Miss These Issues Of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

#1, Summer 1966: *Village of the Dead*, Edward D. Hoch; *House of the Hatchet*, Robert Bloch; *The Off-Season*, Gerald W. Page; *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Edgar Allan Poe; *The Lurking Fear*, H. P. Lovecraft; *The Awful Injustice*, S. B. H. Hurst; *Ferguson's Capsules*, August Derleth; *The Munston of Unholy Magic*, Seabury Quinn.

#2, Fall 1966: *The House of Horror*, Seabury Quinn; *The Men in Black*, John Brunner; *The Strange Case of Pascal*, Roger Eugene Ulmer; *The Wüch Is Dead*, Edward D. Hoch; *Doctor Satan*, Paul Ernst; *The Secret of the City*, Terry Carr and Ted White; *The Street* (verse), Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Scourge of B'Moth*, Betram Russell.

#3, Winter 1966/67: *The Inn of Terror*, Gaston Leroux; *The Other*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Door of Doom*, Hugh B. Cave; *A Matter of Breeding*, Ralph Hayes; *Esmerelda*, Rama Wells; *The Trial for Murder*, Chas. Dickens & Chas. Collins; *The Blood-Flower*, Seabury Quinn.

#4, Spring 1967: *The Tottenham Werewolf*, by August Derleth; *The Secret of Lost Valley*, by Robert E. Howard; *Medium For Justice*, by Victor Rousseau; *Si Urug Of The Tail*, by Oscar Cook; *The Temptation of Harringay*, by H. G. Wells; *The Tenants of Broussac*, by Seabury Quinn.

Price's story was certainly worth the sacrifice—temporary, I trust! I find myself looking forward to more appearance of D'Artois, even if it means that de Grandin must occasionally rest from his harrowing labors—especially if, as you say, he (D'Artois) frequently encounters the followers of Malik Tawua. Seabury Quinn could be represented by a non-series story. I particularly remember one called (I think—it's been a long time since I had access to the magazine) *Fling the Dust Aside*, and there are undoubtedly numerous others in issues of WT that I never saw."

At one time I was impressed by the two arguments against reprint magazines, or even reprints in magazines that mostly used new fiction: (1) who wants to read a story he has read before? (2) unfair to still-producing authors!—but a little thought, and a lot of experience, convinced me how spurious they are.

(1) Who wants to read stories he has read before? Many people. In fact, almost any literary person knows that a story that is really worth reading once is worth reading at least twice; and the finest stories do not yield up their full treasure in only two readings. (It is the unliterary who balk at reading the same story twice!) When it comes to such ephemeral things as stories in pulp magazines, of which only a minority of appreciative readers have kept files, there is every reason in the world to assume that a lot of these stories will either repeat the delight of the first reading or (though perhaps not so often) seem even better the second time. And this may be

either because the stories in question are of quite good quality, so that there is more in them that can be extracted in one reading, or the reader's increased experience between readings enables him to see what he could not see the first time, even though it was there on the page.

More than that: the question *assumes without stating* that everyone has read any story you reprint. I need only to state this hidden assumption to reveal its fallacy.

(2) I was impressed with this one under exactly the circumstances you mention: I, myself, wanted to sell stories to magazines. In actuality, there has never been a large market for all-reprint, or mainly reprint, magazines of fiction—and certainly not enough seriously to impair a new writer's chances of breaking in to print, providing he has both the talent and the willingness to do his homework, or again to freeze an established author out of the market by reprinting his old stories instead of running his new ones.

De Grandin is so well appreciated, generally, that I do want to get one of his adventures in to each issue of SMS, but they all run to considerable length; and that was the reason why he could not be fitted in to issue #7, and why he is missing this time. Mr. Quinn's non-series stories (the best ones) also run rather long; and some, however fine, just do not belong in this magazine, though they would go well enough in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*.

Your memory is accurate: *Fling the Dust Aside* appeared in the November 1951 issue of *WEIRD TALES*. I receive a number of letters each issue, however, either pleading for

Did You Miss These Issues Of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

#5, Summer 1967: *The Gods of East and West*, Seabury Quinn; *The Council and The House* (verse), Robert A. W. Lowndes; *Behind the Curtain*, Leslie Jones; *A Game of Chess*, Robert Barr; *The Man From Nowhere*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Darkness on Fifth Avenue*, Murray Leinster.

#6, Fall 1967: *My Lady of the Tunnel*, Arthur J. Burks; *The Glass Floor*, Stephen King; *Death From Within*, Sterling S. Cramer; *A Vision* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Aim for Perfection*, Beverly Haaf; *The Dark Castle*, Marlon Brandon; *Dona Diabla*, Anna Hunger; *The Druid's Shadow*, Seabury Quinn.

#7, Winter 1967/68: *The Bride of the Peacock*, E. Hoffmann Price; *Nice Old House*, Dona Tolson; *Those Who Seek*, August Derleth; *John Bartine's Watch*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Pet of Mrs. Lüth*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Man Who Chained the Lightning*, Paul Ernst.

#8, Spring 1968: *The White Lady Of The Orphanage*, Seabury Quinn; *The Gray People*, John Campbell Haywood; *And Then No More*, Jay Tyler; *The Endocrine Monster*, R. Anthony; *The Return of the Sorcerer*, Clark Ashton Smith; *The Three From The Tomb*, Edmond Hamilton.

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more material from the issues of the 20s and 30s, or pleading that we do not reprint "recent" material from the 40s and 50s, so I'm a little reluctant to dip into the later issues—particularly when so many requests for specific, available older stories have not yet been fulfilled. (We are, however, using some material that someone has asked for in every issue.)

It is only fair to state that the anti-de Grandin minority still exists; so for their sake, too, it is only fair to let Dr. Jules rest once in a while.

Generally speaking, a magazine does not publish unsigned communications, but now and then an exception can be made, and here's an instance. Lest you, the reader, think that we receive naught but approval of our efforts, here's an anonymous statement to the contrary. Besides the stories listed on the Preference Page in our 7th issue, this reader wrote, in order: "Idiotic, Silly, For Children, For Hopheads, For Boobs, and For Hasheesh Chewers"; and below, added: "You should be ashamed to publish such awful trash especially having the nerve to call it mystery. The only mystery is how you stay in business."

Well, considering the difficulties we have in getting the books on to newsstands, sometimes I wonder myself. Otherwise, I remain unrepentant, unregenerate. The anonymous ill-wisher will have to pray harder, I fear.

And I should also add that some do not care for the old illustrations which we reprint when this is feasible.

(Turn to page 124)

Coming Next Issue

"Scourge me, my master," she wailed. "But take me not away from my beloved."

He struck her again. She turned to me. Something—I know not what—passed over me. She was calling, yet she made no sound. I advanced toward her; she met me; for an instant we stood there facing each other. I looked into her wonderful eyes; then our lips met in one long, long kiss.

A feeling of bliss swept over me; words cannot describe it. I glanced over Meta's shoulder. Lessman's eyes were upon me. They bored through me; my temporal body seemed to disappear, leaving my soul alone to meet that of Meta. . . .

Again a feeling of nothingness swept over me. Then came a strange buoyancy . . . *I was Meta Vanetta!*

Before me stood the dead man—not dead but pulsating with life. His arms were about me; he clasped me to him, drawing me so close that my face was pressed against his shoulder. I was two beings—myself and Meta.

How can I explain it? I was Meta Vanetta, but was Meta Carter Cope? Impossible! I was still Carter Cope, yet the body of Carter Cope lay on the floor where I had left it when I entered the shell of the man who stood before me. Upon his hands was blood—blood from the reeking gashes made by the whip on the shoulders of Meta.

Lessman's eyes! Again that feeling of oblivion—or nothingness—swept over me. I was drifting . . . drifting through space . . . drifting . . .

I awoke. I was leaning against the wall, swaying dizzily. Meta stood on the other side of the room. She was leaning forward, her eyes gazing hungrily at me, her white arms extended toward me lovingly.

"Beloved!" I heard her call. Then nothingness again . . .

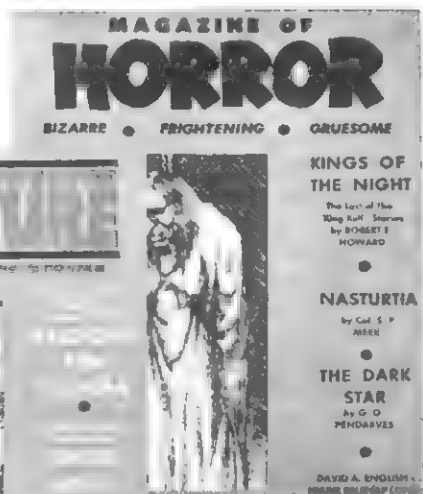
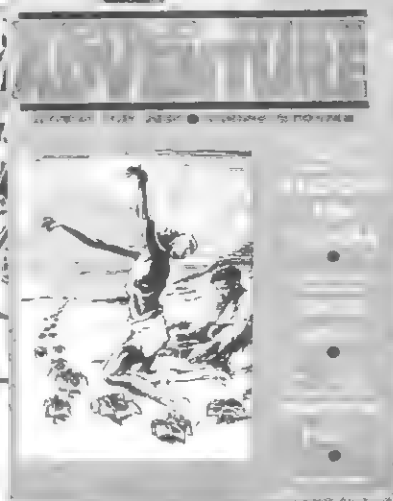
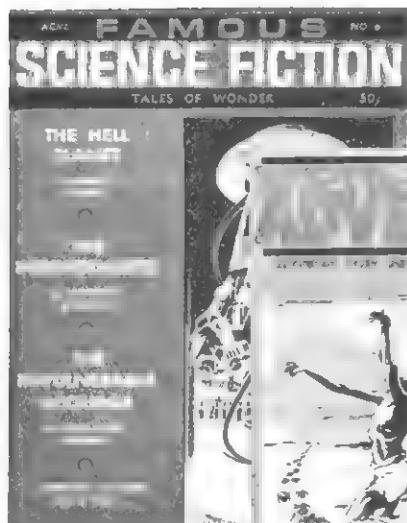
When I awoke, I was lying on my bed of straw. Jake, the beetle-browed man sat up when he saw me stir and gazed at me, frightened. Then he ran from the room, his eyes wide with terror.

There is no mirror by which I can confirm my thoughts. *But I know that I am not Carter Cope! I am the dead man we took from the grave.* Jake knows it; that is why he runs away from me. And my hands are covered with blood—Meta's blood.

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Why Was The Dog Shot In The Night?

Farnsworth swept the searchlight around the mongrel's lifeless body. Then he banged the window shut and sat down again, shaking his head as if amazed that we didn't understand.

"I shot it because it reminded me of something not very pleasant, and to get it out of its misery, for it was slowly starving to death. . . . Did any of you ever have the pleasant experience of building a little fortress out of the bones of your friends?"

He didn't wait for an answer. "I saw a man who had that delightful experience," he went on. "The shock was too much for him. It nearly did me in, too . . ." His voice grew tragic. "All this happened out in the Mongolian plains. And it wouldn't have happened if the human lust for money didn't exist."

Don't Miss This Strange Novelet

TIBETAN IMAGE

by Herb Lewis

complete in Issue #3 of

WORLD-WIDE ADVENTURE

see page 125

ABC's *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* we have seen the cast constantly faced by robots, giant plants (the sea is sure full of them), weird alien intellects, and even werewolves; and every week the crew of the *Seaview* has acted as though it were the first time anything supernatural had ever happened to them."

Well, Fellow Hashish-Chewers, the editor isn't omniscient: the reason why I did not mention Mr. Ernst in relation to the *AVENGER* magazine is that I knew nothing about it. I was not only snobbish in those days (wouldn't have read such "trash" as that) but also poor — couldn't dig up the dimes, nickles, and quarters for anything beyond the science fiction magazines and WT, etc., even if I wanted to read the *AVENGER*, etc.

The Devil's Crypt is indeed a Pierre D'Artois story, which I read through the kindness of Glenn Lord, who loaned me his very fresh-looking copy. I haven't seen the others. Meanwhile, we'll see if it is possible to obtain some of the other D'Artois tales to which I have access, ally as they undoubtedly are . . . Hmm, the salutation above reminds me of Stephen Laycock's delightful burlesque on Sherlock Holmes, *Madden by Mystery* or *The Defective Detective*, wherein a description of the Great Detective's quarters includes mention of a bucket of cocaine with a ladle in it.

Having wrestled with my conscience seven times, I have decided to restrain comment on *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* — or anything else in our field which is presented via the idiot box. RAWL

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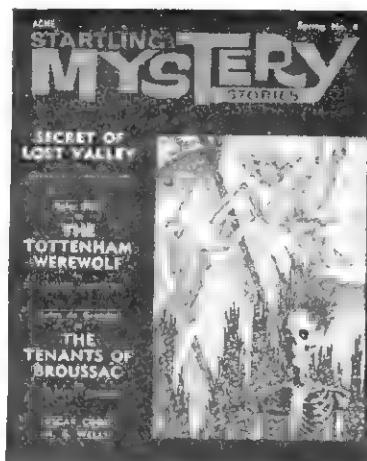
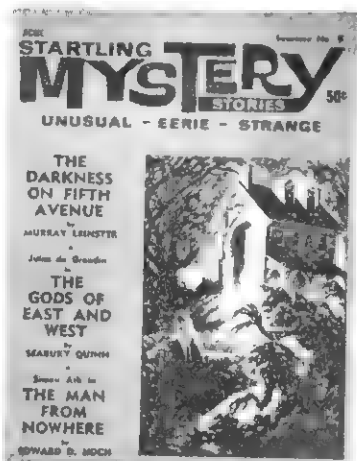
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Comment — Suggested stories, authors, etc.

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Please rate the stories in the order of your preference, as many as possible. Ties are always acceptable. If you thought a story was bad (rather than just last place), put an "X" beside it. If you thought a story was truly outstanding, above just first place mark an "O" beside it. (Then the next-best would be "I")

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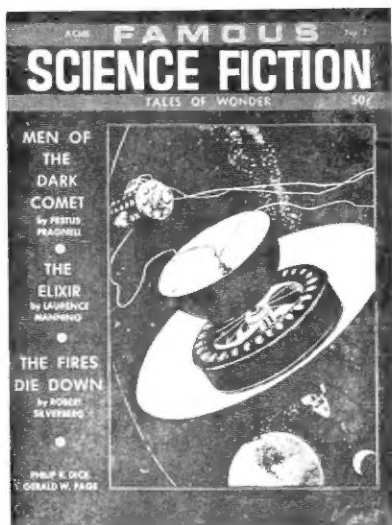
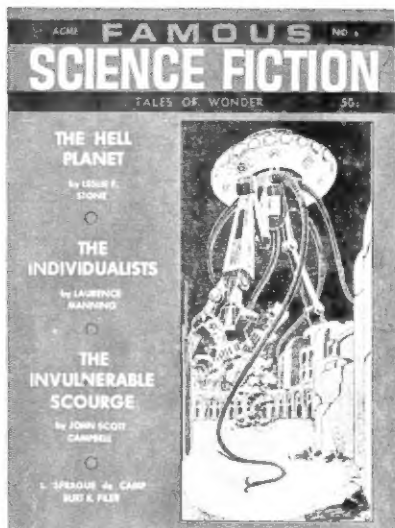
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